A Hobbit's Gamble

by CQueen

Summary

While suffering from his line's obsession with gold Thorin Oakenshield rashly makes an agreement with the Shire's Thain that results in him having to marry one of the hobbit's relatives.

Needless to say he isn't pleased, but cunningly picks Bilbo Baggins to be his consort in revenge against the Thain. For his part Bilbo decides to accept the proposal, though Thorin will be quite surprised to find out why.

Note: I have screwed around with ages, geography and timelines to suit me. You have been warned.
By Royal Decree

Disclaimer: As always I own nothing but the original characters and the situations all characters find themselves in. Everything else belongs to someone else and that's the way it's gotta be according to the lawyers.

Note: I freely admit to having screwed with timelines, ages, geography, and storyline. I will however strive to keep the characters in character and you entertained. You have been warned.

By Royal Decree

The Durin line's obsession with their mountain and its gold had exacted a heavy price. One would have thought that the decades the remaining members of the royal line had spent away from the Lonely Mountain, and how they'd come to lose their home in the first place, would have insured that the dwarves would have learned what was truly important in this world and what was not. But alas, the obsession continued down the line, lying dormant at times but always bubbling to the surface at the worst of times. Thorin, son of Thrain, had seen firsthand what the madness had done to his grandfather and yet, when he was faced with the opportunity to retake his home, when he had seen the mountain again after so many years away from it, he to fell victim to its seductive call like a fallen tree. And it was because of that, after the first attempt to retake the mountain had failed, that he ended up making an agreement with the people of the Shire that honor bound him to not only come to their aid should it be needed in the future-but also to marry one of their kind to cement the deal and insure that his honor would demand that he and those after him would do right by them.

Blinded by his obsession, Thorin Oakenshield had agreed to marry a hobbit.

His second campaign to take back his home had been successful because the halflings had not only provided medical aid and supplies, but had also known of a secret way into the mountain that had been accidentally created by Smaug during his assault on Erebor. They had also gifted him with a special potion that could be opened near the dragon, the vapors from it harmless to dwarves but guaranteed to paralyze the creature, thus enabling them to slay it thanks to the vulnerable spot they discovered in its scaly armor. The new king would have preferred to make it suffer, as his people had suffered, but to avoid the loss of his companions that is what they did.

It was while they worked to chop up and remove the beast's carcass from the hollowed walls of his ancestral home that sense started to return to Thorin, his mind clearing to not only the difficulties that awaited him and his people now that they had Erebor back, but to the price he would personally pay for this triumph.

Many in his company urged him to refuse to honor the bargain he had made, especially since he was now King Under the Mountain and any bride he might take would become his consort. In his weakest moments Thorin had considered doing precisely that, but in the end he had forced himself to accept that he could not dishonor his line even though the leader of the hobbits had taken advantage of him and the situation. He had let himself be used this way and he would look at the bride he would take as a constant reminder to never again let himself be controlled so again.

And he had gotten some revenge so to speak, a bad choice in wording made in the hastily drawn up contract he'd signed when agreeing to the Thain's demands in exchange for his help. It stated in the contract that he agreed to marry a member of the Thain's own family, not specifying who that someone was-or their gender.

When he'd been in negotiations one hobbit had been present who had tried to argue on the dwarves'
behalf. The halfling had tried to reason with the Thain, believing that they should give the dwarves aid because it was the right thing to do, or only demand a small amount of coin in return for their help if some trade must be made. Once his head had cleared up Thorin had recalled the hobbit's attempts to help him and it hadn't taken much effort to learn that the halfling, whose name turned out to be Bilbo Baggins, was distantly related to the Thain. In fact, most hobbits were related to each other somehow and he had named the man as his choice for consort.

That had certainly shocked the Thain, who had no doubted imagine one of his female kin producing a heir for the new king who would one day take the throne, but he had his sister's sons as heirs and had no intention of allowing someone who was not purely dwarf to ascend the throne after him.

Not about to repay the hobbit's kindness by forcing the man into something against his will, Thorin had approached Bilbo first, having already learned that the other man was a confirmed bachelor who was well thought of by most and considered kind, intelligent, and known to have a surprising interest in the world around him that was apparently quite uncommon in a hobbit.

So he had visited the hobbit, explaining both his situation and his reasons for choosing him. It would be a marriage in name only, and while the next few years would not be easy in some ways he would provide the hobbit with whatever he desired and would place no responsibilities on his shoulders. He would live a life of privilege and prestige, the consort of a king.

What he would have done if Bilbo had refused him Thorin wasn't sure, but thankfully, after the halfling had asked for a couple days to think it all over, the other man had agreed to the arrangement and a new deal was struck.

Once Erebor was fit for it, there would be a royal wedding to mark its reclaiming.

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Many in the Shire thought Bilbo Baggins insane for agreeing to marry the King Under the Mountain, and the hobbit didn't necessarily disagree that they were wrong. He'd long ago passed the age when most of his kind married, and though no one mentioned it to his face he had no doubt that it was whispered behind closed doors that he was one of those unfortunate hobbits born with the highly regrettabley inclination to desire his own sex instead of a female as was proper. Which was indeed true, though he didn't see himself in the same light as the most conservative of his kind did. Of course unlike them he was fairly familiar with the other races and knew that such inclinations were accepted among the dwarves due to the rarity of women, marriage between two males even allowed if permission was granted by their king.

Since he was marrying the king he didn't anticipate that being a problem.

And he had not agreed to marry the dwarf because he desired to be rich, powerful or famous, he did not want to be the husband of a king with all the strings and obligations that entailed regardless of what the dwarf had said about the life ahead of him. No, he had agreed to the marriage because he wanted Thorin Oakenshield.

When he'd been young he'd loved, loved with all his very being until the thought of being without his beloved had made death seem more preferable. The hobbit he'd loved had not loved him to the same degree though, choosing to marry and have children as that was what was expected of any normal, respectable member of their society. His heart had been broken, his dreams shattered, and his desire to pursue other relationships had been pretty much non-existent for the past twenty odd years.

He'd been used to that life until Thorin Oakenshield had come to the Shire asking for their help, his stunning blue eyes burning from within with power and determination, the dwarf's hard, muscled
body moving with warrior grace as the king had passionately pled his case while displaying a love for his people and home that had taken Bilbo completely aback and had shocked him into feeling, wanting-drawing him like a moth to a flame.

Not being a fool he knew he was being one, which didn't make sense to him even as he thought it, but Bilbo shoved that aside to concentrate on what was important to think about. Agreeing to marry a man who'd actually told him to his face that he found him so undesirable their marriage would be in name only-it was perhaps the stupidest decision he'd made in his fifty some years of life. But the idea of this man, this beautiful man marrying some other hobbit because he'd said no-he hadn't been able to stand the thought of it. It had hurt too much. And it had been so long since he'd felt this way for someone that he'd been determined to seize his chance and try-try to find some way to make it work.

If it didn't-well then it would be one hell of an adventure, and he had promised his mother on her deathbed that he'd have at least one before he passed on too, carrying on the Took tradition of behaving in a way no proper hobbit would.

How he wished Frodo or Gandalf was around to talk to, the hobbit thought to himself with a sigh, missing them both dreadfully. They would miss the wedding too, which would no doubt peeve them both quite a lot when they learned of it. Merry and Pippin would be annoyed too, but that was only because the two hated to miss a party and opportunity to drive their relatives to drink that much quicker. The relatives in question were going to throw him a going away party, but none of them would be traveling with him to Erebor for the actually wedding. That was probably for the best in the long run, he knew, but more friendly faces would have been nice. Thorin had offered to arrange escorts for his people so that they could attend and be brought back to the Shire safely, but he'd told the dwarf that his kind weren't comfortable leaving their homes and the very idea of going to the Lonely Mountain would have a number of them reaching for their smelling salts. The other reason was that none of them approved of what he was doing, but he hadn't mentioned that to the king least he take it as an insult.

But he'd see Gandalf and his relatives when they got back from their journey to destroy the ring the dwarves had discovered on their trek to the Lonely Mountain, Bilbo reminded himself sternly, determined not to let the attitude of his kin affect him. Personally he didn't see how a mere ring could be cause for such concern, but according to Gandalf destroying it was of the utmost importance and his heir and three of the boy's friends had ended up going with the wizard, Strider, a dwarf and an elven prince. Frodo would have quite the tales to tell when he got back, no doubt.

And he would have stories to tell him in turn, Bilbo acknowledged as he forced himself to turn his attention back to packing up the belongings he would be taking with him.

Quite the stories to tell all around.

Thorin had made it absolutely clear to his travel companions that they were to treat the halfling like he was already a member of the royal family. The five he'd asked to travel with him were some of his closest and most trusted friends, which was why they were still quite outraged that their king was being forced by honor to marry some hobbit. A hobbit was better than an elf, they agreed, but the queer creatures didn't grow beards, were obsessed with eating, and weak as babes when it came to the battlefield. And being male this hobbit wouldn't be able to provide Thorin with children, which meant that the halfling was going to be beyond useless and nothing but trouble.

Listening them discuss the odd things they'd heard about hobbits and their habits Thorin just shook his head and mentally prayed that they would behave once they reached his intended's home. He was
particularly worried about Kili, but he hadn't thought it wise to leave the boy back at the mountain. His nephews were a lot more trouble together than they were apart, and he had left Fili somewhat in charge of things. Balin was supervising, naturally, but he'd thought it a good idea to give his heir a taste of what it was like to have a kingdom on your shoulders.

He imagined the boy was going to be ridiculously happy to see him when he got back.

"I still say he must be a terrible person—not even one of his relatives wanting to come to the wedding." Kili was saying when Thorin tuned back into the conversation, his nephew's stubbornness clear in his voice. "It's very suspicious, I tell you."

"And also true that hobbits don't like to leave their territory. They're shy and timid creatures after all. The unfamiliar scares them half to death." Nori countered, trying to be a little optimistic for their king's sake.

Kili considered this and then speculated as to whether or not this Bilbo Baggins would die of natural causes before they even got to the mountain, the shock of the three day journey doing him in.

Not liking the hope that was in his nephew's voice Thorin reminded the younger dwarf that his soon to be uncle had obviously thought he could handle the journey and life on the mountain since he'd agreed to marry him in the first place. And there would be no attempts to hurry the halfling to his death or betting as to when that might occur either.

The look on the faces of the other dwarves indicated his 'no betting' edict had come a little too late.

"Well I'm looking forward to meeting the wee fellow." Bofur announced, the dwarf having volunteered for this mission because he'd feared his companions would scare the hobbit off before the ring was even on the man's finger. Thorin had picked this hobbit for a reason, and while he didn't know precisely what that reason was Bofur was sure that of all the hobbits in the Shire Bilbo Baggins must be the best one.

Grateful for Bofur Thorin could only hope the dwarf and Bilbo became fast friends on the journey home. He was concerned about the fact that the hobbit would have no one at the mountain, especially given the less than warm reception the other man would face once they arrived. Many of his people were against this marriage, especially now that he was king and therefore had the clot to marry someone appropriate to that rank. That he had decided on this course of action wouldn't stop his people's prejudices where non-dwarves were concerned. But he had warned Bilbo that he would face some opposition, feeling it was only fair to alert the hobbit to the situation, and the man hadn't seemed worried about it and he could only hope it would remain that way.

Lost in his thoughts as to how he could make this easier on his intended Thorin was surprised when they crested a hill only to spot the hobbit in question waiting for them at the bottom with a small but sturdy looking horse and cart, the latter weighed down with what he assumed were the hobbit's personal belongings. Obviously seeing them as well the hobbit gave a flick of the reins and started up the hill to meet them, the horse appearing to have no problem with the load.

"Well at least he's prompt." Bifur pointed out, studying the hobbit closely.

Deciding to meet the man part way Thorin nudged his own mount into heading down the hill, turning around so that he was riding alongside the cart when they met up. "Good morning."

"Good morning to you as well." Bilbo knew he looked sleep deprived, and boy was he ever, but he worked up a smile that he desperately hoped hid the worst of his nerves. "I hope your trip here was pleasant."
"It was. Is this everything you're bringing?"

"Yes. I decided to leave the furniture and such for Frodo when he gets back. I tried not to bring my whole library but I'm afraid there were too many I couldn't quite bear to leave behind. I hope that won't be too much trouble."

They'd have to make more stops than he would have liked to give the hobbit's horse rest from its burden, but the cart wasn't so big that they should have too many problems. The halfling seemed to have packed well, securing everything properly, and worst case scenario they could store the cart and its contents somewhere and come back for it with animals better able to carry the load.

"It should be fine. Do we need to stop anywhere so that you can say goodbye to anyone?"

"No. No I said goodbye to everyone last night. They threw me quite the going away party, which is why I probably look a mess. I didn't really sleep at all to tell you the truth, which is why I decided to come out and meet you."

From where he sat Thorin didn't think a lot of the man's relatives, who apparently didn't care enough to travel to Erebor to see Bilbo married and support him, but it wasn't his place to speak badly of them until he and the hobbit were married. Then the man's relatives would be his and he'd have plenty to say about them whenever they came this way to visit Frodo Baggins, who was Bilbo's heir and was apparently like a son to his intended. He hadn't had the chance to meet the young hobbit, but if he was willing to go off with Gandalf to destroy the cursed ring he and his company had found Thorin was inclined to think well of the lad.

"Ready to go?"

"Ready."
Traveling Companions

Note: This takes place in 'The Hobbit' timeline. I've just aged my favorite hobbits so they can destroy the ring ahead of time because I hate when its fate is left hanging in fanfics.

Traveling Companions

Once they had reached the others at the top of the hill Thorin made the introductions, pleased all around that his friends and nephew greeted his intended politely and that Bilbo was just as cordial, even thanking them for coming to escort him when they must have wished to remain in their mountain now that they'd gotten it back. Since he'd been worried that the hobbit would be upset he hadn't brought more men to insure his safety Thorin was grateful for that comment, suggesting that they start out as soon the general pleasantries had been taken care of. He was eager to get back to his mountain too.

As previously planned the other dwarves moved their mounts so that they were encircling the cart, acting as a sort of shield between their king's future consort and any unexpected danger. They weren't expecting any trouble, but it never hurt to be prepared.

They hadn't gone far when Kili asked Bilbo just how exactly the hobbit was related to the Shire's Thain, the young dwarf's voice making it clear what he thought of his future uncle's relative.

Lines appearing across his forehead as he sought to recall the exact connection, Bilbo slowly stated that he was fairly sure that they were fifth cousins twice removed on his mother's side, and third cousins on his father's. "I think that's right. I prefer to pretend I'm not related to him at all."

"You don't care for him then?" Gloin asked, thinking that would speak well of the hobbit.

"Oh we don't get along at all." Bilbo assured him with a grimace. "He's always after me to rein in Merry and Pippin even though those two are not only not children anymore, but aren't my children to control anyway. He knows he won't get anywhere with their actual parents, you see, and since they're so fond of my heir Frodo he seems to think I should be after the boy to set a proper example for them. Of course he's complained about Frodo plenty too, and over the silliest of things! I mean fussing about his hair, really."

"What's wrong with his hair?" Bofur asked, curiosity piqued.

"Nothing." Was Bilbo's firm reply. "Bingo just seems to think hobbits should wear their hair as short as he wears his. Frodo's is only a little longer than mine, but he's after me to make the boy cut his constantly, and after me to cut mine as well."

All the dwarves were in complete agreement that the Shire's Thain was utterly detestable for wanting to force the poor boy to cut his hair and said so.

Interested, Bilbo gave Thorin a questioning look. "I know dwarves are very particular about their beards…does the same apply to your hair?"

It wasn't as big a deal, no, but hair was to be kept long and only trimmed when absolutely necessary. As far as they were concerned, Kili blurted out, Bilbo's hair was far too short.

Rather than take offense Bilbo just laughed. "Those of you with straight hair can't begin to understand the perils of long, curly hair. Believe me, men with hair like mine would look horrible with hair as long as yours, Kili."
All eyes going to Bilbo's hair, the sun picking up the blond highlights beautifully, they had to admit that the way he looked right now was far more appealing than imagining him with curls hanging down to his waist, overwhelming the smiling face that was remarkably pleasant to look on.

"Your hair does suit you, Lad." Bofur assured him with a wink.

"Thank you. It suits Frodo too. Merry and Pippin as well come to that, though I won't argue those two do need to be reined in more than a little. One can only hope their time with Gandalf sees them growing up a little."

Curious to learn more about the hobbits who'd gone on the mission to destroy the ring, Gloin in particular wanting to know since his son had gone with them, the dwarves stumbled accidentally on a topic that was guaranteed to keep Bilbo talking for the rest of the morning as he heaped praise upon his heir and Samwise Gamgee. In between stories about them Bilbo told the dwarves about the mischievous and trouble making cousins Meriadoc Brandybuck and Peregrin Took. This included the story of the time the two, at the age of seven, decided to add an entire bottle of whiskey to the punch bowl reserved for the children at a spring festival, no one the wiser until the young ones began throwing up during dinner and the older ones removing all their clothes and pretending to be farm animals.

It had always been one of his favorites.

Twenty four stories about the pair later, the dwarves were so tired from laughing that Thorin called a break for lunch early, hoping that the meal would provide him with some time to regain his composure. He was not a man given to chuckle, much laugh easily, but he had a feeling that not even the snottiest of elves would not be able to keep a straight face if they'd been listening earlier. He was actually rather looking forward to seeing what his intended and the Mirkwood elves made of each other.

Glancing in the direction of the cart Thorin wasn't surprised to see that unlike the others Bilbo was busy feeding treats to his horse, who he'd fuss over in between stories since they'd left the Shire. The halfling spoke to it like it was a child…and the creature seemed to be eating the attention up with every mouthful of carrot or apple. Not that he blamed the beast, Bilbo did possess a surprisingly soothing, appealing voice.

Looking over at his nephew, who was grinning widely still as they tied up their horses, Thorin shook his head in bemusement, the barest hint of a smile on his lips. "And here I always thought you and Fili were handfuls. It seems there are at least two hobbits in this world who can make the pair of you seem well behaved by comparison."

Kili frowned, unsure whether to take that as a compliment or not. On the one hand his uncle was actually saying there were worse duos than him and Fili like it was a good thing, but still…he didn't like the thought that he and his brother had been outdone by a couple of hobbits.

He and Fili would have to discuss it when they got back to Erebor.

Everyone gathering their food for lunch they took seats on the grass or rocks, the dwarves did their best not to stare at the fact that Bilbo, who'd come over last, was carrying a whole hamper's worth of food. They knew that hobbits ate a great deal but even Bombur…

"Uhm, you're all welcome to help yourself to some of this." Bilbo said as he took a seat beside Thorin, thinking that was the most proper. "My family gave me a great deal of the leftovers from last
night to bring with me. Some of it will spoil if it's not eaten soon."

While the dwarves watched with growing interest, especially since their lunches weren't anything special, Bilbo spread out a blanket on the ground and then started pulling out containers filled with finger food and fancy desserts.

Seeing the way his men were looking at the mini banquet Thorin held up a hand and ordered them to wait, telling Bilbo to take what he wanted first as there would be very little left once his men started helping themselves.

Frowning, technically he was sort of the host and therefore should eat last, Bilbo decided maybe this was a dwarf thing and not wanting to be rude took out a plate and helped himself to a little of everything before announcing he was done. Moments later, watching the dwarves descend on the food like wolves, Bilbo had to admit that his future husband had probably been very smart to have him go first.

"Aren't you going to have any?" Bilbo asked when he noticed Thorin was simply eating the lunch he'd brought.

"I ate well at breakfast." Actually he was somewhat tempted, the hobbits did know their food after all, but his men needed the sustenance more than he. It was a habit to look after them first, and one he didn't intend to break any time soon given the loyalty these particular men had shown him in the past.

To distract himself from the food Thorin asked Bilbo if he'd had a big breakfast too, since he hadn't taken much for himself.

"Oh, no, I actually had hardly any breakfast, though I ate my normal amount at second breakfast." Bilbo's lips curved a bit sheepishly. "I know that dwarves only eat three meals a day so I've been trying to cut down on my meals since you-uh-proposed. I've managed to cut out two whole meals." He added quite proudly.

While it was somewhat a relief to know that the man's recent weight loss wasn't a result of dreading their coming marriage Thorin didn't appreciate the suggestion that he couldn't feed the hobbit properly either. To that effect he informed the halfling that there was no need to cut back on his meals, that there would be enough food to cover all-how many meals did a hobbit have, anyway?

"Seven." Helpfully Bilbo rhymed them off.

"Where do you put it all?" Bifur wanted to know. "You should be as big as my brother Bombur."

"Actually, I was bigger than I am now before. I had to have most of my clothes taken in recently," Bilbo admitted ruefully, patting his stomach. He hadn't been this thin since he'd been Frodo's age. Unfortunately he didn't know whether dwarfs liked their men with rounder stomachs or not, but he rather thought he looked better without a shirt on now. Of course he didn't have a beard and couldn't grow one, which seemed to be a far bigger deal to them in the grand scheme of things. He probably wouldn't appeal to Thorin even if he were as beautiful as an elf, Bilbo acknowledged sadly, studying his plate. Actually scratch that, hobbits were better than elves in the eyes of dwarves. It was probably the height thing. He had a better chance with the dwarf king than an elf.

Bilbo chuckled at the thought.

"What amuses you?" Kili wanted to know, icing on the edge of his lip from the cupcake he'd just devoured.
"Oh…uhm…I was just thinking about how some people reacted to me cutting back on my meals back home. A number of them thought I was ill."

"You will eat as you need to once we are back at Erebor." On the road it wouldn't be ideal for the hobbit to eat everything in sight, but once they were back at the mountain he would not have his intended thinking for one moment that he couldn't provide for him.

Sensing that this was important to the king somehow Bilbo nodded, though he had no intention of doing so. The dwarves were currently rich in coin and metals, but not in food as they struggled to use their material wealth to buy the produce necessary for their continued survival. He would not eat more than any dwarf until the whole mountain had food to spare.

"So does your heir look like you, Master Baggins?" Bofur asked, thinking to avert an argument. He’d seen the stubborn set of the hobbit's jaw over the food thing and Thorin hadn't missed it either from the way he was eyeing the other man.

"Frodo? Oh no, he is considered QUITE the catch among the ladies." Extreme parental pride was back in the hobbit's voice. "In this case he takes after his mother's side of the family; he was often mistaken for a girl when he was a hobbitling. He's unusually thin, not built nearly as sturdy as the average hobbit, but everyone agrees that he's the best looking hobbit to come out of the Baggins family in at least five generations. In coloring he more resembles Thorin or Kili than me. Frodo's hair is raven black and he has the most stunning blue eyes I've ever seen."

Kili wasn’t sure whether to take being compared to a hobbit yet again as insulting or not, while Thorin was a little taken aback to find himself wondering what Bilbo thought of his looks. And while the halfling eating so neatly beside him wasn't very good looking by dwarf standards, he would have still called him appealing if he were answering honestly. Did the hobbit not see himself clearly, or were the people of the Shire really so blind to what was worthy of admiration and what was not?

Pushing the thoughts aside, what did they matter after all, Thorin went back to being silent while Kili asked for another story about Merry and Pippin, his nephew apparently wanting to know more and his and Fili’s competition when it came to finding and causing trouble.

Late that night, when the traveling was done for the day, Bilbo lay inside his sleep roll and stared up at the stars above him. He was a little sore and tired, but the bench on the cart had been padded enough that his rear hadn't suffered too much and he was surprisingly awake considering the late hour. All around him he could hear the sound of snoring, as well as a blade cutting through wood off to the side where Bofur was standing guard, whittling to pass the time. The toymaker was his favorite of Thorin's companions thus far, Kili a little exasperating but sweet as well. The others didn't talk much but they seemed nice enough as well, which was encouraging. He really wanted them to like him after all, sensing that their opinions of him would matter a lot to the king they were so obviously devoted to, Kili in particular.

The screech of an owl nearby had him jerking a little in surprise, though his logical side identified it before his heart settled down again. It reminded him of the fact that when he’d been little his mother had taken him out to sleep in the nearby woods, rhyming off the creatures responsible for the sounds they’d heard while they lay under their blankets.

"You cannot sleep?"

Turning his head in the direction of Thorin's voice, he'd thought the man asleep, Bilbo did his best not to fidget as he answered. "I suppose it's all the excitement, not knowing what's to come. Soon I'll
be farther away from home than I've ever been."

"Yet you agreed to come." Which he still didn't understand, especially since nothing he'd learned about the hobbit indicated the man was interested in social status or personal wealth.

"Yes, I did. It's the Took in me, I suppose. My mother's side of the family. You wouldn't believe it, but back when I was Frodo's age I was considered very adventurous and brave, though not by the standards of Men or dwarves. I grew out of it of course, a hobbit must, but when Frodo came to live with me... he was so interested in the world outside the Shire that I sort of got pulled back into being fascinated along with him. I'd imagine if he hadn't come to live with me I'd have probably been polite when you came to call and turned you down flat."

Thorin had been on plenty of 'adventures', and while he didn't regret them, he wouldn't have retaken his mountain otherwise, he could have done without them. If he could have never left Erebor that would have suited him just fine. But his life before Smaug had undoubtedly been more interesting than the life one would live in a sleepy little village full of people who seemed to like their lives to be as dull and boring as possible.

And thinking of adventures Thorin asked the hobbit if he worried for his heir. The Eagles had agreed to fly the fellowship to Mordor to dispatch the ring, but they would have to land at times and the world was a very dangerous place for those unfamiliar with its perils. Even the most seasoned of travelers had cause to tread very carefully in certain areas.

"I can't help but worry... but Gandalf is with him, and Strider. I'm sure Gloin's son is quite the warrior, and the Mirkwood prince as well. And Frodo's cousins and friend Sam might not be fighters, but they'd die to keep each other safe."

"You know Gandalf well?"

"He was good friends with my mother. He didn't come around often, after she passed away, but he started coming somewhat regularly recently, after meeting Frodo. The two are fast friends."

"I look forward to meeting him."

Bilbo smiled at that, he wanted the two to meet as well. And since they were on the subject... "Why is it so important the ring is destroyed?"

A long pause greeted the question, Thorin finally giving the answer that the ring was cursed to do harm to all those who tried to use it, as well as giving those with evil intent more power.

"I see. It's good that it will be destroyed then."

Gandalf had sworn him and his company to secrecy as to the exact nature of the ring they'd taken from the creature called Gollum. He'd said that it wasn't safe for word to get out that the One Ring had been found and was going to be destroyed. Naturally he'd heard the legends, and had given some thought to trying to wield it himself to retake his throne, but at that point in the journey the sickness of his line had yet to take hold of him and his trust in Gandalf had been strong enough that he'd allowed the wizard to take it and hide it somewhere safe, retrieving it after the Lonely Mountain had been retaken.

So Thorin didn't explain how noble and brave the quest Frodo and his friends had undertaken was. He'd leave that to them to tell.

"Go to sleep now. It will be morning soon enough."
Note: The story Bilbo tells about the trolls is just because that's my favorite scene of the first movie so I had to include it in some fashion. Hope you enjoy heh.

Up A Tree

The next morning the dwarves didn't know what to be more surprised about, the fact that the hobbit had apparently risen before all of them, or the fact that he was immaculately dressed in a new outfit and smelled like honeysuckle as he went about warming up some breakfast. As before Bilbo offered to share the food he'd brought with him, charming them in spite of themselves. It seemed that unlike the rest of them the halfling had opted to bring real food instead of travel rations, which made his provisions a great deal more appealing and their acceptance of his offerings immediate.

Hobbits were curious folk, but by Mahal they knew their food.

Once everyone had added some of the hobbit's food to their rations the dwarves and Bilbo settled into eat, the friends talking amongst themselves while Bilbo just listened. He would learn more about them that way, and he really hadn't gotten enough sleep the night before and it was only ingrained habit that had had him rising as early as he had.

So he stayed quiet until Kili made an offhanded remark about how he hoped Fili, his brother, wouldn't have to deal with any elf delegates before they got back, the other dwarves agreeing with that since the prince got along with the pointy eared menaces about as well as Thorin did.

"If you'd like help dealing with them, I'd be happy to help." Bilbo told Thorin as soon as he'd finished swallowing. "I speak Elvish."

Surprised, Thorin asked why he'd bothered to learn that language, his tone making it clear that he thought anything related to elves wasn't worth knowing.

Knowing full well that it wasn't in his best interests to go into a spiel about the fascinating history and culture of the Elvish race, especially when he was in such awe of them and it showed, Bilbo simply explain his decision as a choice based on his love of languages in general. He would have loved to have learned to speak Khuzdul as well, he assured them, had the opportunity been there.

"As my consort you may learn it, though you need not worry about the elves. They are my burden to deal with."

"But I would be middle ground between the two of you." Bilbo protested, seeing a way to make himself useful to Thorin. "They would have no problem dealing with me, and if you just tell me what you want from them and what you're willing to pay then I could act in your steed. You'd never have to deal with them when it comes to trivial matters, only on the truly important matters."

"I promised you a life of leisure in exchange for your agreement to be my consort."

"And any consort who does nothing to help his or her people when they can does not deserve that title."

With mouths hanging slightly open the other dwarves watched in stunned silence as a hobbit not only argued, but was currently trading glares with their king as the two went back and forth with increasingly forceful tones of voice. They were pretty sure the men had forgotten that they even had an audience as they learned more about the arrangement between the two than they'd previously
And then their jaws dropped down to the ground when Bilbo slapped a hand over Thorin's mouth, cutting off whatever it was their king had about to say.

Oh no you don't, was all Bilbo could think, you are not telling the others that our marriage is going to be in name only. His level of personal pride might not be on the same level as dwarves, but he'd die laughing before he'd let anyone outside the two of them know how little Thorin desired him.

His mouth open wide in shock behind Bilbo's hand, it took Thorin a minute of unrelieved silence before it occurred to him why the hobbit had reacted that way. And the look in his intended's eyes, well that look suggested the much slighter man would gut him like a fish if he dared to speak another word about their future married life. He was not used to being looked at that way, least of all by someone he could disarm or kill so easily, and while normally the implied threat alone would be reason to kill him, in this instance...Thorin found the hobbit's behavior to be rather endearing, strangely enough.

He could feel Thorin's lips curve against his hand, Bilbo hand dropping away immediately since he wanted to see the dwarf smile.

"You have courage, Little One, though common sense..."

Scowling at the nickname and the other implication, Bilbo very pertly reminded the man that that nickname was very funny considering they both belonged to races that were noted for being smaller than many in terms of stature.

"Even though you are surprisingly tall for a dwarf." Bilbo belatedly added, finally realizing that not only had he possibly crossed the line, but had done so while they had a rapt audience.

"You'd do well to keep that in mind."

No one talked much after that, not even after they'd packed up and once again set off to continue their journey home. None of the dwarves knew what to make of this hobbit who kept surprising them as their preconceived notions were laid to ruins, and Bilbo thought it wise not to call too much attention to himself since he wasn't entirely sure he hadn't just insured a very cold reception at Erebor once the dwarves around him got done telling their kin and friends about his behavior earlier.

And the worst part was the fact that he couldn't apologize for what he'd said because while Bilbo wasn't sure what Thorin would look for in a life partner, he was sure that the king would have no interest in someone without strength of character. He couldn't look weak, especially when dwarves seemed to think that his people were timid and easily frightened by nature.

Perhaps that was true in many cases, but he was both Took and Baggins, and that meant he was tougher than most. Probably. He hoped.

It was only during and after lunch that the chatter really got going again, most of the talk revolving around how they were going to safely navigate a stretch of ground that wouldn't allow them to encircle the cart and its passenger. It was also not the best in terms of terrain, which was how it came to be that Bofur was assigned to ride on the cart and lead the pony instead of Bilbo, who decided not to argue with this decision since he wouldn't mind the company and his ego wasn't so big that he couldn't admit that Bofur could probably handle the pony better than him in an emergency.

So after lunch Bilbo found himself sitting beside the dwarf as they headed out, the hobbit torn as to
whether he should attempt to engage the dwarf in conversation or not. Luckily this particular member of Thorin's company was more observant than most, because he sensed the hobbit's hesitation and immediately set about putting Bilbo at ease.

"You needn't worry about Thorin, if you are. It can only do him good to have a consort with some backbone as far as I'm concerned. Man's too hard headed for three dwarves sometimes. I wouldn't apologize either, if you want my opinion." Bofur took his eyes off the trail just long enough to wink in Bilbo's direction. "You'll be good for him, I'm sure of it now."

Ears burning just a little Bilbo smiled gratefully nonetheless, relieved to hear that at least one of his new companions still liked him after his height comment. "Thank you, Master Bofur."

"Just Bofur's fine, especially with you insisting we call you Bilbo." And with a grin on his face the dwarf asked if Bilbo made a habit of going toe to toe with people who were a great deal stronger and bigger than him.

"No, thankfully, I usually have more sense." A rueful look came into the hobbit's eyes. "And that earlier argument ended a lot better than the last time I angered someone a great deal bigger than myself."

Concerned and intrigued, Bofur immediately wanted to know what had happened.

"I got thrown into a tree."

When Bofur just stared at him in dumbfounded shock Bilbo couldn't help but grin quite mischievously as he launched into the story about how he'd come to be thrown into a tree by a very angry mountain troll.

It had happened when a sickness of unknown origins had come to the Shire some ten years before. They'd come to call it 'The Sleeping Sickness' because it seemed to drain all the energy out of those who caught it, and caused them to lie about in bed without the strength to so much as lift their head. Many remedies had been tried, all failing, and so when a good friend of his had caught the sickness he'd decided to head to a valley a day's ride away from the Shire where there were plants that his mother had once told him had strength building properties. It had seemed worth a shot and he hadn't gotten sick so he'd thought that perhaps the strange plants his mother had been feeding him since he was young had had something to do with it.

He'd collected as much of the plants as he could and had decided to spend the night there in order to give his pony a rest, the beast old and not used to the pace he'd set for it that day. It was while he was cooking dinner that he'd been set upon by three mountain trolls, the horrible creatures passing him around between them as they discussed whether to boil him alive, chop him up and put him in stew, or just fight for the right to eat him whole and raw.

"However did you get away?" Bofur wanted to know, it a real struggle now to keep his eyes off the incredible storyteller beside him, who painted such a vivid picture in his mind that his heart was pounding in his chest even though he knew the hobbit came out of it all right since he was sitting right beside him.

"By convincing them I was a dwarf."

"What?!"

"Well you see they'd never seen a hobbit before so they had no idea what I was. Once I realized that they were a little leery of eating me because of that I formulated a rather genius plan if I do say so
myself. I told them that I was a dwarf, only I'd been struck with a horrible, mutating disease that had caused my muscles to waste away, my beard to fall off, and had caused my ears to become misshapen. I told them that I'd been cast away by my kin because I was highly infectious, and that they should go ahead and eat me because then my misery would end. Then I added that at least I knew I'd be avenged against them since they were sure to be infected themselves when they ate me, and then they'd rue the day they met me."

"That's brilliant!"

"Thank you." Bilbo had to stop himself from puffing up a little at that, especially since this story always got him looks from his elders when he told it back home. "Anyway, my ploy worked, obviously, because I'd hardly gotten my explanation out before the one holding me threw me in disgust, sending me sailing into a tree quite a distance away from them. As you can imagine that could have ended very badly for me, but luckily my coat managed to catch on a jagged branch, giving me time to regain my senses before I attempted to get down on my own. I was quite battered and bruised by the time I got down, but I was alive to tell the tale which was more than I had expected. My poor pony though, they ate her instead."

Bilbo's smile faded a little as he remembered poor Marigold. He'd taken to growing the flowers she'd been named for in his garden, a sort of memorial, and he would miss their bright color. He could only hope that this new pony of his didn't meet a bad fate.

"And did the plants help your people, then?"

Immediately perking back up Bilbo was delighted to say that they had, though it had taken a passing tinker with knowledge of the sickness to finally rid them of the problem for good. A very nice man, that tinker, excellent wares of fine quality.

Falling into a discussion about the buying and selling of wares, both men passionate about the art of bargaining and disdainful of those who never argued a price, Bilbo and Bofur had a lovely time regaling the other with the best deals they'd managed to wrangle both in buying and selling.

"You really should work on Thorin to get him to let you help him with the elves." Bofur declared at one point, slapping his knee in enjoyment. "You'd be much better at it than him. You've a right sharp mind, Bilbo Baggins, and the charm needed for this sort of thing." It went without saying that Thorin and diplomacy didn't often go hand in hand.

Blushing quite prettily Bilbo somewhat bashfully thanked the dwarf for the compliment. He didn't know about charming, but his mother had always said that one of a hobbit's greatest weapons was their minds. They weren't built for combat, nor did their lifestyle and culture provide much opportunity to learn. Their ability to hide and go unnoticed were certainly valuable in dangerous situations, but that wouldn't save them if they were caught by whoever meant them harm. If they were captured than all they had was their wits, and that they could keep as sharp as any blade even in the Shire.

Fairly sure he would have liked Bilbo's mother Bofur said so even as he thought to himself that the halfling beside him really was rather cute when he blushed, and he could see why Thorin had picked him. He might not be attractive by most dwarven standards, but then cuteness wasn't exactly considered appealing unless one was referring to their children. He was a toymaker though, so he had a great appreciation for the adorable and cute.

He'd do what he could to see Thorin and his new friend were a happy couple, Bofur decided with renewed determination. He wanted Bilbo to keep smiling so prettily, and Thorin to forget himself and show them a softer side they'd rarely gotten to see over the years.
The sound of the halfling's laughter was musical in nature, the dwarves having to work hard not to look back towards the cart that was positioned in the middle of their company, Bofur apparently saying something that Bilbo found utterly hilarious once again. In the two hours the two had been traveling in the cart together the others had been caught again and again by the laughter and interesting faces their friend and Bilbo were making at each other, Kili nearly running into a tree in distraction at one point. Thorin, for his part, had allowed himself only a couple glances backward to check on the pair, disturbed by his strange feelings regarding the fact that the two seemed to be becoming as thick as thieves. Hadn't he wanted them to be friends, knowing that Bofur would be a good one for his consort to make?

So why did he have this puzzling desire to punch the toymaker?

Shifting to glance in the direction of the cart yet again, Kili wondered out loud what they were talking about now, his insatiable curiosity getting the better of him. Plus his future uncle did tell some very interesting stories, and he was eager to hear more as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

Unfortunately Thorin had made it quite clear he didn't think he could be trusted to talk to Bilbo AND drive the cart.

"They'll be talking about your inability to stay on your mount if you keep directing your attention behind us instead of forward, nephew."

Shoulders hunching at his uncle's tone, he knew it all too well, Kili tried and failed to look like he didn't know what his king was talking about. "You know, Uncle, perhaps you should ride with the hobbit after our next stop. You are getting married after all, and I'm sure he'd like your company."

If his uncle was sitting in the cart he wouldn't be able to yell at him as easily, plus the two together would be a lot less distracting since they quite obviously didn't along nearly as well as Bilbo did with Bofur. Uncle Thorin wouldn't be interested in stories either, so that would mean the hobbit would save them for later, when he'd hopefully be around to hear them.

The look Thorin gave him in response to his suggestion had Kili going very, very quiet.

Appreciating the silence, though he had no doubt it wouldn't last long, Thorin turned all his concentration to what lay ahead, refusing to acknowledge the way the hobbit's laughter and smiles threatened to shatter his concentration, or his desire to be the one the halfling was heaping those sweet gestures upon. The safety of his company and consort were all he should be thinking about, the plans he would implement once he returned to Erebor the only thoughts that should be competing for his attention.

Besides...he would have years to enjoy his consort's laughter, smiles and sass.
The rest of the journey was relatively uneventful, Bilbo getting the chance to learn more about Thorin's friends and Thorin himself since after the first ride with Bofur his intended had rotated who rode with him on the cart so that everyone not of the Durin line took a turn. Thorin never did, unfortunately, but according to Bofur that was just because their leader naturally felt he had to lead the way at all times. His new friend was quite sure his king would be riding with him the whole way there if it was possible. Naturally Bilbo knew that wasn't true, but he decided he wouldn't be fooling himself too much to believe that Thorin would have ridden with him at least once if he wasn't obsessed with being in front to face any potential danger first.

By the time they arrived at their destination night had fallen, the small group having pushed on ahead due to the mountain's nearness and their desire to reach home and sleep in their own places.

Bilbo didn't bother to ask if there would have been a welcoming committee if not for the late hour, at this point he was too tired to care and concentrated instead on not falling off the cart in exhausted weariness. In some corner of his mind he knew he should also be paying more attention to his surroundings, this was his introduction to his new home after all, but in truth he was so homesick that not even the front entrance, which probably would have bowled him over otherwise, could impress him. He got out of the cart when he was told to, handing over his belongings to a stranger without a word of protest because that didn't matter either. He just wanted a room, a bed, and to be alone at this point.

"Tomorrow, once you've rested, I'll give you a tour of Erebor." Thorin said as he came to a stop beside the hobbit, who looked more than a little tired and worn to him. Still dressed well and perfectly put together, but the journey had obviously been a bit much for the gentle halfing. With that in mind Thorin eyed the sack that Bilbo had taken from the cart, his clothes no doubt, and nimbly nipped it from the hobbit's hand before the other man could protest. It was the least he could do after all. "Come, I'll show you to your rooms."

Struggling to understand what he was being told Bilbo nodded his head, willingly to let the dwarf carry his bag for him if it meant he'd get to a warm bed that much faster. Nor did he complain when Thorin took his arm and then dismissed the others for the night once they were safely within the walls of Erebor, Bofur assuring the hobbit that he'd personally see to it that all his belongs made their way to him come morning.

Remembering his manners Bilbo worked up a smile and managed a small bow. "Thank you, Bofur. Good night, Everyone. Thank you for your escort here."

All of them saying their goodbyes with various degrees of affection and amusement over the state of the sleepy hobbit, the other members of the company left their king and the man's consort to make their way through the mountain without them. The two needed alone time anyway, and Bofur kept a firm grip on Kili just in case the prince decided to double back despite their edict not to.

Too exhausted to even care or get excited that they were alone for the first time since Thorin had proposed to him, Bilbo was content to let himself be led, wondering how he was ever going to learn to navigate this place when pretty much all the hallways looked alike to him. Which could just be his exhaustive state, he was hoping that it was. And they were taking the long way apparently, the faster route still under construction.
"You're homesick."

Bilbo jerked in surprise when Thorin finally said something that was actually related to the personal, and he didn't even bother to deny the truth of the statement since it was probably brutally obvious. Not to mention the fact that he knew that few knew the state he was in better than the dwarves he'd been traveling with the past few days. "Yes, but I'll be fine."

Silence reigned once more for a good five minutes and then Thorin spoke again, his tone betraying little. "What we think something is like, what it will cost us often falls short of our imaginations. It will be ten days until the ceremony. You have until then to decide whether you wish to stay or not. I will not hold you to your word until after we are married."

Eyes widening in surprise Bilbo let go of the arm through his and instead took Thorin's hand in his without thinking the gesture through, wanting only to make his commitment clear. "I'm not going to change my mind, Thorin. I'm staying. With you."

Looking down at their joined hands Thorin couldn't remember the last time his hand had been held. For a very long time now affectionate gestures aimed in his direction came in the form of head knocking and back slapping, handshakes and the very rare hug from those closest to him. None of that was remotely similar to having the hobbit's soft, small hand clutching his so trustingly. The halfling had all but entered a new world here, one so removed from his previous life that there was little comparison between the two.

And this man, this Bilbo Baggins of the Shire, was determined to stay. With him.

"My word is my bound, as you well know, but-"

"Are you trying to talk me out of staying? Do you regret asking me?" Thinking nothing of interrupting Thorin, especially when he was too sore and worn to care about manners, Bilbo tightened his hold on the dwarf heavily calloused hand, having no intention of letting go any time soon.

He was confused for a moment, by the hurt that he heard in the hobbit's statement, so that it took Thorin a moment to come to the conclusion that he'd hurt the other man's pride, not his feelings. They didn't have the sort of bond or relationship where that would be an issue. Would they someday though...perhaps, as friends. Given how quickly his hobbit had endeared himself to their travel companions it would appear that Bilbo was very easy to like and get to know. And he'd already decided that the halfling was the best choice he could make given the decision he'd had to make concerning his future consort so his answer was obvious.

"No. I wish you to stay."

"Good. Because I am, Thorin Oakenshield."

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Given Thorin's statement that their marriage would be in name only, Bilbo had expected that they would have separate rooms. As it turned out it was apparently normal for royal couples to have their own rooms, usually connected by a door or in their case, a bathroom, which was somewhat a relief to the hobbit who hadn't liked the idea of the servants gossiping about their sleeping arrangements. There would still be gossip of course, but at least this made it look a little better. Plus he actually had three rooms all to himself, a front parlor area, a study of sorts that he would be thrilled about later, and most importantly a bedroom for him to sleep in.

There would be a bed in that room for him to sleep on, which at this point was all he cared about as they stood in his new, very empty looking parlor. He'd look over everything and start planning where his things would go tomorrow and said so. He just wanted to go to sleep.

Amused, the hobbit was nearly asleep on his feet, Thorin nodded and settled for reminding the other man that if he needed him he had only to go through the bathroom and knock on the opposite door. Otherwise he'd see him for breakfast in the morning.

Nodding his understanding Bilbo was finally reminded of the fact that they were still holding hands when Thorin let his go, the hobbit frowning at the action though his brain was too foggy at the moment to allow him to form an embarrassing complaint.

"Good night."

"Good night." Bilbo echoed automatically, the two staring at each other awkwardly for several heartbeats before Thorin nodded, handed over the bag he'd carried for the halfling, and then left through the main door so that Bilbo was finally alone in his new quarters.

Thankfully, at this point, Bilbo was just too damn tired to care how alone he suddenly was in this strange place.

It was also entirely due to his father's training that Bilbo didn't just climb into the bed he desperately wanted and pass out like he longed to. But his father had been fastidious about treating his clothes well and the importance of a proper nightly routine. Even mostly unconscious he could hear his father's voice lecturing him about what he had to do before he was allowed to turn in for the night, which was more than a little annoying. Allowances had been made while they were traveling but they were indoors now, with a proper bed and bathroom, and that meant there was no excuse this time around.

Muttering under his breath that it was times like this he almost wished he was more like a Took, Bilbo stripped out of his clothes in his new bedroom then and neatly piled them on a chair, opening his bag then to withdraw and don the nightshirt he hadn't worn during the journey since he was far too proper to wear such a thing in front of strangers. It had been a present from his grandmother and too big to begin with, made worse thanks to his recent weight loss, but he hadn't seen the point in replacing a nearly new garment just because it slid down to show a lot more shoulder than it was supposed to. No one would see after all.

Mussing his hair up as he ran his fingers through his curls Bilbo let himself yawn widely without bothering to cover his mouth as he grabbed the pouch that contained some of his most necessary grooming supplies and then headed back out the way he'd come.

Okay, just one more thing to do and the rest...he'd deal with later.

Yawning all the way Bilbo headed for the door that apparently led to the bathroom, blinking in stunned shock at the opulence that greeted his eyes when he opened the door and got a look inside. By all of Middle Earth…
It was huge, for one thing, but what really got him was the fact that the floor beneath his feet is a mosaic, meant to look like a huge sun in a blue sky with the highly polished yellow, red and orange gemstones seeming to burn and swirl before his eyes. There was another mosaic on the far wall too, above the tub, and it had been designed to resemble a waterfall, the lack of sound jarring because Bilbo felt he should be hearing the water rush down to crash on the rocks beneath it. And once he got over that...well then he had to marvel over the size of the black marble tub, which he was fairly sure he could swim in if he so desired, though not really well. More than enough room for two, anyway, he thought with a fair amount of blushing.

Embarrassed by his mental images Bilbo turned too quickly towards the sink and nearly landed face first on the ground as he stumbled, his exhaustion throwing off his balance. By the grace of the gods he caught himself, the loss of equilibrium snapping Bilbo out of his daze and reminding him that it would be a very bad thing if he were to continue to dawdle and gap at everything, especially since he didn't want Thorin coming in here in the morning to find him asleep on the floor or possibly even standing up.

Deliberately turning his attention back towards the sink he wasn't going to ooh and ahh over despite it deserving the attention, Bilbo walked over and set down his bag, retrieving and then unscrewing the lid off one of the containers. Setting the lid aside he dipped one finger in the herb concoction Bilbo thoroughly covered it and then went to work rubbing the mix into his teeth as quickly as he could.

When he was done with the necessary tasks Bilbo turned the tap on to wash his hands off and then put the items he'd gotten out back in his bag. He'd just leave it here for now, no point in carrying it back with him when he'd need it all tomorrow anyway.

Taking one last look around, he couldn't help himself, Bilbo sighed over the pearly white sink that had been shaped to resemble a quarter moon, the black marble countertop inlaid with familiar constellations in silver that popped against the darkness of their backdrop. It occurred to him too that there might be more to see on the ceiling, but he reined himself in and simply promised himself a thorough look over in the morning.

Decision made Bilbo was about to head back to his rooms when the other door opened and Thorin stepped through, looking very surprised to see him.

He must need to use the bathroom, Bilbo realized, giving the other man a small, sleepy smile as he told him the lovely bathroom was all his before heading towards his own door and slipping out before the dwarf could say anything.

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Thorin wasn't exactly sure how long he stood there like a complete and utter fool, deciding later that it was probably for the best that he didn't know. All he did know for sure was that he now had a number of images engraved into his brain that he really could have done without, mental pictures that he was very sure were going to make his dealings with his intended more than a little awkward for the next little while at the very least. It might have been a very, very long time since he'd been in this position, Thorin acknowledged, but what he did remember was not pleasant.

And the whole thing was utterly ridiculous, Thorin told himself after he'd gone back to his own bedroom, suddenly wide awake and incapable of quieting his thoughts. He was far too old and busy to be so easily distracted by someone he was marrying as a matter of convenience and duty. Someone he couldn't bed even if he were to admit to himself that it he hadn't seen anyone look quite so beguiling and seductive as his future consort had looked in the bathroom in quite some time. Dark honey curls all mussed, eyes sleepy and half lidded while the halfling stood there in a night shirt that
showed far too much pale, lightly freckled shoulder-and was liable to drive a man half mad the way it hid the rest of its wearer shape, taunting him to find out what was underneath and hidden from his sight.

Hobbits weren't built like dwarves after all, so much smaller and delicate looking by comparison. He didn't know anyone who'd ever stated what a hobbit looked like without clothing, and now Thorin had to admit he really rather desperately wished to know. Was the hobbit's skin as soft and smooth as it looked, as lovely to touch as the hand he'd held in his so naturally on their walk to the rooms that were so close to his own. And hobbits didn't grow beards, did that mean the only body hair they allowed were on their heads and feet? Were their ears as sensitive as elves were said to be, both being of a pointed nature?

And realizing abruptly the dangerous path he was going down Thorin called himself an even bigger fool for overlooking one very important detail, the fact that he'd heard that hobbits did not lie with those of the same gender. The Thain of Bilbo's Shire had confirmed that when he'd argued against his choice in consort.

He hadn't thought it mattered when he'd decided on the halfling for his consort, having had no interest in marrying at that point except as a political strategy anyway. He'd never been married, and at his age he'd long grown accustomed to a solitary life that revolved around his people and Erebor. Wanting something for his pleasure alone…was not a luxury he'd had since his grandfather had ruled this mountain before him.

Perhaps if he were of Kili's age, and had the boy's youthful optimism, he'd pursue Bilbo regardless and attempt to woo the hobbit and introduce him to the pleasures that could be had between men, but no…he'd already said that this was to be a marriage in name only, stated at the time because he'd thought the hobbit would reject his proposal otherwise.

So he'd simply bury these feelings, Thorin decided resolutely, dwarvish stubbornness such that he had no doubt he'd have no problems in the future now that he'd seen the problem and come up with the only viable solution.

They'd just be two confirmed bachelors who just happened to be married to each other.

He'd make it work.

Somehow.
A Bit of Sun

In the days that followed both Bilbo and Thorin knew that the dwarf hadn't been wrong to think that the hobbit might regret his bold decision to move to Erebor. It was one thing to believe you could live somewhere and an entirely other thing to live the reality. The hobbit's Shire and the great city of Erebor couldn't be more different, and the material things Bilbo had brought with him from his home couldn't replace the things the hobbit found him desperately needing as the days went past. He needed the warmth of the sun and the feel of grass beneath his feet, fresh air brought on a breeze that carried the scents of earth and nature's bounty. Hobbits were children of nature after all, delighting in the earth's beauty and giving to it as much as receiving. Dwarves simply took what they wanted from it and shunned the world outside their mountains and rocks unless they had to. Bilbo knew none of them would understand his need for the outside world, especially since they'd spent decades mourning the loss of this mountain retreat, but they would understand homesickness. But to complain about his situation, which had been his choice when they'd had none, seemed very selfish and petty to the increasingly depressed hobbit.

Not that he had much opportunity to talk to anyone about his thoughts and feelings, which certainly didn't help matters. The dwarves he'd met thus far didn't have time to socialize with him, though that was mostly because the men and women of Erebor had the excuse of rebuilding a city and preparing for the royal wedding to worry about. It also didn't help that his future sister in law didn't like him or any hobbit at the moment thanks to her overprotective instincts where her brother was concerned, and Dis wasn't shy about making her feelings on the matter and him well known. At this point he figured he was just lucky she hadn't shoved him down a convenient crevice.

He'd had nightmares of her doing precisely that.

He also rarely got to see any of the dwarves that had had helped bring him to Erebor besides Thorin and Kili, and when he did see them at meals Bilbo couldn't bring himself to complain, especially since he'd already promised Thorin he was staying. And he wanted to stay with Thorin, that hadn't changed…

Sighing at the thoughts he couldn't escape Bilbo shook his head, his aggravation only growing when he realized that he was in a passage he was pretty sure he didn't recognize. Which wasn't saying much, the bloody hallways all tended to look alike, but the guard who'd left his side about five minutes ago had done so because he'd told the dwarf he intended to go to his rooms and stay there until lunchtime. As there was only one way in to this section of the royal chambers the dwarf had remained behind to guard the entrance with the other two dwarves who occasionally took a turn watching him, trusting him to find his way on his own.

Apparently that trust had been misplaced.

Saying a very bad word under his breath Bilbo had to count under his breath for a couple minutes before his temper and need to kick something abated enough that he was sure he wouldn't accidentally break a toe or three on any of the rock surfaces.

Squaring his shoulders determinedly Bilbo decided to keep walking a bit, hoping that he'd spot one of the marks he'd very craftily hidden on the hallway walls to help him find his way around this area at the very least. And thank every deity in existence for his brilliance, the hobbit decided minutes later when the torch he'd been given provided enough light for him to spot one of his marks, Bilbo rushing over to the fork in the road so to speak with a loud sigh of relief.
It was then, as he stood in that space, that he felt it for the briefest of moments. A gust of wind.

Turning his head sharply in the direction it had come from, like a weather vane atop a hobbit hole, Bilbo dimly remembered that the tunnel he was looking at was one he'd asked about before, Thorin telling him that it contained a part of the royal residence that had yet to be touched or cleaned up. There were more important things to take care of at the moment, and that area had been used in the past for the children of the mountain's ruler. He and Thorin would have no children so that part of the palace, so to speak, would not be needed until Fili took the throne and had a family of his own.

He'd been told not to go down unfamiliar tunnels or hallways without an escort, and that was sound advice, no question, but if it had been the children's quarters than it couldn't be that far from his own rooms as the young dwarrows would have been kept close to their parents. So really, so long as he was careful and watched his step, there was no reason why he couldn't-

Bilbo had hardly taken more than five steps down the tunnel when Thorin's voice reached his ears, inquiring as to just where he thought he was going and was he lost again.

Turning around to meet his fiancé's gaze Bilbo didn't bother to lie as the dwarf approached him with echoing steps. "I felt wind come from this area and wanted to see where it's getting in."

"Why?"

"Fresh air is always appreciated...when you're a hobbit." Bilbo tacked on, since dwarves seemed to breathe in the stagnant air like the finest of perfumes because it was home.

Well aware of their cultural differences, not to mention their preferences when it came to their abodes, Thorin didn't bother to comment on Bilbo desire for fresh air. It was just one of a no doubt very long list of things the little hobbit was missing since he'd come to Erebor. Bilbo tried to hide it well, he'd give the other man that, but even a fool could see that the hobbit was getting quieter by the day, the strain showing in the halfling's eyes and lack of real smiles. He didn't like seeing it, but there was nothing he could do about it until the stubborn fool admitted that he couldn't be happy here.

And since he liked the idea of Bilbo leaving about as much as he liked the idea of the hobbit being unhappy because of him, Thorin instead turned the subject to the answer to Bilbo's question. "There is a large room that way which was damaged by the dragon when it attacked the mountain. It's open to the air in places, but it's high enough that it's unlikely to be used by our enemies. We'll shore it up eventually."

"What was the room used for?"

"A play area for the very young." A tightening of his jaw betrayed the pain Thorin felt to know that that piece of his childhood had been wrecked along with so many other things. The beast was dead, but it still caused him agonizing pain at times when he saw what the cursed dragon had destroyed in his absence.

Bilbo felt bad for asking if it was safe for him to check the room out, but the words were out before he could stop them. He needed to breathe that air, that fresh air so close he could still feel it.

Hearing the eagerness in the hobbit's voice Thorin couldn't see how the reality wouldn't disappoint, the room was in ruins now, but he also knew Bilbo well enough now to know that there was a good chance he would explore on his own later if his curious need wasn't appeased now. "I'll show you."

"Oh, I don't want to be a bother."
Waving aside the hobbit's protests Thorin simply started walking in the right direction with Bilbo falling into step beside him with his little torch. It wouldn't take long after all, and then he could return to his duties knowing that Bilbo was safe in his rooms once more as he'd be seeing the halfling there himself afterwards.

There'd never been doors to the room to Thorin's knowledge, the space littered with broken rock, damaged or destroyed play equipment and toys, and the fountain that had once stood so proudly in the middle of the room.

Bilbo saw none of this though, his eyes locked on the bright blue sky visible through the largest gap, the fresh mountain air he was breathing in reenergizing him instantly as he forgot all about Thorin as he hurried over towards that sky, nimbly making his way through the rubble while Thorin's warnings to be careful fell on the hobbit's currently deaf ears.

And then he was standing before the gap and he could see not only the sky but feel the sun on his upturned face. The sun. Finally.

Having caught up to the surprisingly fast halfling Thorin felt like he'd taken a blow to his chest when he saw the expression that was on his intended's face. The hobbit's eyes were closed in bliss, his smile one of total contentment and satisfaction. He had not thought to see the other man smile so happily ever in his home. To him the sun meant only that there was still plenty of work to be done before night fell, the sky and winds indicators of the weather perhaps but that didn't really matter so much when you lived inside a mountain. He didn't understand the pleasure in these things, but he could take pleasure in Bilbo's pleasure in it.

The minutes ticked by without a word being spoken, Thorin's only action to lightly wrap his fingers around Bilbo's wrist so that he could jerk the hobbit away from the opening if need be. Otherwise he simply remained at Bilbo's side, a silent sentinel.

When he'd breathed and felt his fill Bilbo opened his eyes, immediately turning his attention to Thorin. "May I have this room?"

"The room?" Thorin repeated, not understanding the request.

"Yes. I can live in Erebor if I have this room. I need to see the sun, have fresh air and green things. I need life, not stone. I could make a garden in here, bring in dirt and I'd do all the work and…and it wouldn't be for that long really, in the grand scheme of things. Once I'm gone it could be turned back into a play area for Fili and Kili's children or grandchildren, depending on when they have dwarrows." Reaching out with his free hand Bilbo clutched the arm that held his other wrist. "Please, Thorin? I'll let you look over all my plans and-" Bilbo's words died as Thorin held up a quelling hand.

"This is all you need to want to stay here? This room with its present view and a garden?"

Bilbo couldn't nod fast enough.

"Then you may have it."

Beaming his happiness Bilbo couldn't thank Thorin enough, unaware that his brilliant smiles alone were payment enough.

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After a while Thorin had to insist that they leave the room, he needed to go back to work and he wasn't about to leave the hobbit alone since he'd seen for himself how quickly Bilbo lost any sense of
his surroundings when sunbathing. He didn't want the man falling down the mountain to his death because he'd leaned out too far. And while Bilbo thought that an exaggeration, he wasn't a fool after all, he wasn't going to argue since Thorin had just given him the room for his very own.

When Thorin brought up the question of what he would do when winter came Bilbo just smiled, reassuring the dwarf that he'd be able to handle it so long as he could go into the room to breathe fresh air when he needed it and see the sky. Hobbits were a lot hardier than a lot of the other races gave them credit for.

"Just like you thought you'd be fine living here without such things." Was Thorin's dry response to that, the blush that greeted his words tempting him to smile, though he managed to hold it in.

"One doesn't always understand what they need until it's gone."

Agreeing that this was so Thorin lapsed into silence as he allowed himself to hope again that the hobbit could be happy in Erebor, Bilbo lost in thoughts about his garden.

The trip to the hobbit's rooms didn't take long, Thorin seeing the other man inside before taking his leave, promising as always to see him at dinner.

"You always do." Which had surprised him, Bilbo silently thought to himself and not for the first time, but it was a gesture he appreciated, knowing how busy his future husband was. The poor dwarf worked far too hard in his opinion, which had been waved off by everyone he'd suggested that to. Thorin Oakenshield was too strong and powerful in the eyes of his subjects to get tired.

"Until then."

Heading off Thorin had to admit that he was always pleased to see that his presence had seemed to make Bilbo happier in the previous days. He'd looked forward to dinner for that very reason. If not for that he would have preferred to work through the meal, even though he'd been raised by a mother who'd made it clear to her husband and children that not showing up for meals on time was a crime punishable by burnt food, and in his father's case being made to sleep on the floor. That was a family tradition it would be good to keep, though Dis would probably have his head if he tried to do otherwise now that she was used to them all eating as a family again.

He'd have to tell his sister about giving Bilbo the room too, which she was bound to dislike simply because she was determined to dislike the hobbit. She was convinced it had all been some sort of conspiracy and that Bilbo had somehow planned to become his intended even though he'd spent at least an hour trying to get it through her unusually thick skull, even for a dwarf's, that the Shire's Thain had intended for him to marry a female member of his family so that there would be children who would someday rule. Unfortunately Dis was convinced that not even the Thain, who she desperately wanted to kill, could be stupid enough to think a half dwarf, half hobbit would ever be allowed to rule Erebor, and nothing he said would change her mind. Now that he thought there might be a good chance Bilbo was staying…well he'd better start trying to endear the hobbit to his sister more for everyone's sake.

Of course the question of how he was going to do that was troubling, the king acknowledged as he made his way through passages he could navigate blindfolded even after all these years. The fact that Bilbo had yet to soften Dis's feelings towards him said quite a bit about his sister's stubbornness since the hobbit was ridiculously likable once you got to know him. The spies he'd employed to keep their ears open concerning his future consort reported that while the general populace wasn't happy about their king marrying a hobbit, the majority of the dwarves who'd actually had a chance to meet Bilbo had favorable things to say about his future consort. Many were lamenting the fact that they didn't think the 'poor', 'fragile' little creature would survive a winter here apparently.
He should probably be more concerned about the betting that was going on as to just how long Bilbo would last, everyone seeming to view the halfling as too weak for their much more demanding lifestyle, but Thorin had decided that if nothing else Bilbo would be that much more determined to stay alive in Erebor just to prove his naysayers wrong if he knew. Stubborn creatures, were hobbits it seemed.

"An almost smile, most unusual."

Turning his head to the left to see Balin coming towards him, Thorin simply raised an eyebrow at the older dwarf's amused statement. "Balin. Did they send you to come get me?"

"No, I was waiting for you, Lad." Falling into step beside his king Balin's eyes gleamed with a hint of mischief as he asked what had put his majesty in such a good mood. It had not been a good morning, after all, and last they'd spoken Thorin had been ready to take a pick axe to some particularly obstinate heads.

"I walked it off." Or that had been what he'd been trying to do when he'd happened to run into Bilbo earlier. He'd forgotten about the heads he wanted to beat in then, though now that Balin mentioned his disastrous morning Thorin could feel his former, throbbing headache and bloodlust returning. Especially since he was about to take another damn meeting with many of the same dwarves who'd angered him earlier.

Not quite believing that Balin held his tongue, knowing Thorin would be aggravated enough shortly as the various Guilds and family groups demanded their areas be given more seniority over others in terms of reconstruction, labor, and supplies. Everyone thought their trade and people were the most important, the most needed to get Erebor back to its former splendor. He'd offered to take this meeting in Thorin's place, claiming that their king had wedding plans to deal with, but Thorin had been insistent about attending. His people weren't happy about who he was marrying and why, after all, so he needed to make it clear to them that he was strong enough to take care of everything without neglecting anyone. He'd tried to explain to Thorin that you could never make everyone happy, but the mule-headed boy refused to listen.

Only Dis's head was harder than Thorin's, unfortunately.

Both dwarves arriving at their destination, the two shared fortifying looks and then headed in to verbally beat some sense into some stubborn dwarves' heads. And if that didn't work, well there was always the option of beating their heads together in reality. A great stress reliever, that.
It was the night before the wedding and Bilbo could not believe how nervous he was. It was natural to be nervous before such a momentous event, he knew that logically, but he had never expected to ever get married, not since he was a mere hobbitling. Thank all the powers that be that he'd been given his room to relax in or he'd probably be out of his mind at the moment. Which was just plain foolish, he knew that, but even knowing that this wasn't a real wedding Bilbo couldn't help but worry over everything, even though most of the details had been out of his hands from the very beginning. He hadn't really had a say in anything because he didn't know anything about dwarvish weddings and it would have been ridiculous to try and plan the wedding from the Shire even if he had. Though he'd ditched the suggestion of wearing a fake beard for the ceremony, he'd been firm on that and had made sure that Thorin told the overly conservative dwarves who'd apparently suggested the idea that that was a definite no. Thankfully his future husband had agreed with him completely. So all he'd had to do was put up with really was the fittings for his clothes and learning the thankfully short sentences he would be expected to say in Khuzdul when they exchanged their vows. That was really the only other thing he'd put his foot down over, insisting that his teachers break the verbal aspects of the ceremony down so that he'd know what the hell he was promising and Thorin was saying in return.

Thankfully there had been nothing to object to, dwarves were very blunt and not at all flowery even in their marriage vows.

He had a list too, to make sure he didn't forget any of the small details that he would be seeing to by virtue of the fact that they were his plans and didn't involve the dwarves in the slightest. This wouldn't and couldn't be like a hobbit wedding, but he'd decided to incorporate what he could even if he'd be the only one that knew. They were just simple things really, like carrying a good luck piece sewn into his clothes, which he'd done behind the makers' backs earlier, and planned to use a very rare and special tonic on his hair in the morning that would bring out his golden highlights and make them shine bright as gold. Nothing terrible special or obvious, but they would tie him to his past which was what was important.

And yet…he couldn't seem to shake this feeling he had that he'd forgotten something, even with the list.

That was probably just the nerves, Bilbo told himself, or his mind's attempt to ignore the fact that he was a little sad too. His family wouldn't be here, and his mother in particular would have loved this. The idea of her only child marrying a dwarf would have probably amused her to no end. She'd been so very disappointed when she'd realized he had no intention or marrying or ever providing her with little hobbitlings for her to spoil and try to corrupt with her Tookish ways. She'd been good at hiding her sadness and regrets where he was concerned, for his sake, but every once in a while he'd caught her watching him, such a sad look in her eyes while she-OH!

He had forgotten something!

Smacking the heel of his hand against his forehead Bilbo called himself every sort of idiot, particularly since he'd left this to the last bloody minute and almost forgot. All right, not THAT close, but he was definitely sorry that he'd put this off because he'd long ago forgotten the speech he'd planned to deliver when the time came. He hadn't wanted to spring it on Thorin as soon as he arrived at Erebor, he'd wanted privacy for this particular discussion, but by the time he should have done it he'd been so wrapped up in wondering if he could live in the mountain that he'd forgotten about
Pulling out his time piece to gauge the time Bilbo figured he better hurry even though he'd be a bit insulted if Thorin was already fast asleep when he was so very awake and fidgety. Heading for one of his chests Bilbo opened it up and after sorting through it found the pouch he was looking for, opening it and letting its contents spill into his outstretched hand. Closing his fingers around it reflexively Bilbo took a calming breath and then tossed the pouch back into the chest and closed it all up again.

That done he left his rooms and spanning the bathroom came to a stop at the door that connected the room to Thorin's. Knocking hard on it Bilbo sent up a mental wish that he would be heard and not interrupting anything.

He didn't have long to wait, though the poor hobbit's jaw noticeably dropped at the sight of Thorin's bare chest. It took Thorin three times for his inquiry as to what was wrong to register.

Cheeks flushed with color Bilbo immediately apologized for staring, stumbling over his explanation that he'd never seen anyone with such a…well defined chest before and had been caught quite by surprised. Oh, and he was also sorry for bothering him so late and hoped he wasn't being a bother.

Staring at the hobbit who seemed utterly fascinated by his own feet at the moment, Thorin didn't quite know how to take the other man's comment about his chest, but decided there was no harm in him taking it as a compliment. Restraining the sudden impulse to see what Bilbo would say or do if he were actually to flex his muscles, Thorin instead stated that Bilbo wasn't interrupting anything and what could he do for him.

"I-uhm-have a favor to ask of you." Was the halfling's nervous response as Bilbo continued to look at his feet. "I meant to ask before but I forgot."

"What do you need?"

Taking a deep breath for courage Bilbo forced himself to look up and meet Thorin's gaze, telling himself that he couldn't look any lower or he'd make a complete fool of himself. "I was wondering if you'd be willing to wear something for me tomorrow. You see—before she died—my mother gave me this ring that had been passed down on my father's side and was always given to one's intended as an engagement present, to be worn at the wedding specifically. She made me promise to continue the tradition should I ever find someone and—and I know it's too small for you and that it's plain in comparison to what you usually wear and not at all something a king would wear or want to keep…"

Bilbo trailed off for a moment and then continued, opening his hand so that the simple ring on its golden chain could be seen. "I put it on a chain and if you wouldn't mind wearing it under your clothes tomorrow I'd be very grateful."

Understanding dawning, Thorin's eyes softened as he nodded his head, not caring a wit about the look of the ring or what others might think of it. "I would be honored, and will wear it proudly."

"Really?"

"Really." Taking the chain that he was handed, the ring swaying between them, Thorin's lips twitched ever so slightly when he saw the delicacy of the chain's clasp. "You'll have to fasten it, it appears." Actually he could probably manage it with some fumbling, but he would rather Bilbo do it.

Fighting not to blush again, he'd done quite enough of that already, thank you very much, Bilbo accepted the chain back and watched as Thorin lowered his head and moved his hair out of his way so that he could see what he was doing. It took him two tries, but he soon had the chain fastened, the
chain just long enough that any shirt Thorin wore would hide the ring from sight.

"I will take good care of it."

"I know you will. And thank you, for wearing it. It means a lot to me."

As he stood waiting for the ceremony to begin the next day Thorin did his best not to squirm or think about the fact that he felt like he had weights all over his overheated body. He understood that one had to dress up when you were getting married, he wasn't completely oblivious to fashion necessities, but Thorin was convinced at this point that his sister and those charged with preparing his clothing and accessories for this had gone more than a little overboard. He had way too many layers on, plus the armor and robe heavily lined with fur, and then the crown that weighed heavily on his head to add insult to the injury. He could live with the multiple rings and other add ons, but he would have been very happy to ditch the rest and hoped his intended wasn't similarly burdened or someone would have to carry the poor hobbit to him.

Though if that was the case he'd say to hell with convention and head down to take his consort from his deliverer and carry him the rest of the way himself. No one else was allowed to touch his hobbit more than was absolutely necessary.

Since thinking about Bilbo seemed a good way to help him ignore the rest of his current trials Thorin smiled a little as he reached up to fiddle with the chain that hung proudly for all to see, the ring shining brightly against the steel it rested against. He'd had to pull the 'I'm king' card to get everyone to back off about wearing it publically, but he'd wanted Bilbo to know that he was wearing it. His hobbit had given him something precious to him, an unspoken promise and show of trust that had settled him down so that he could worry about his clothes and not whether he was going to be stood up because Bilbo had decided to leave after all.

No, he knew the hobbit was in this until the end now.

Trumpets sounded, words shouted out in the otherwise quiet room as the hundreds of occupants went still and silent. Then they were all turning to look as Thorin looked, towards the back of the room as the wedding procession began walking down the aisle. And like Thorin the room's occupants mostly ignored the gaily dressed children who enthusiastically tossed flowers as they walked, the guards and other members of the royal family who'd stepped in to replace Bilbo's family. No, most everyone's attention was on the small hobbit who came after the royal family, backed by his three bodyguards who were hardly noticed by anyone.

The halfling was dressed all in white, with golden threads woven into the tunic and pants so that they shimmered in the firelight. The cape was white as well, as startling as the rest of Bilbo's clothing because white was not a color you saw often in Erebor unless it was someone's hair color. Such a pure, bright color, easily dirtied and marred, but here shown to still be clean and unmarked, making Erebor's future consort look that much more unworldly and 'other' in the most fascinating of ways. The crown that rested on Bilbo's brightly shining curls was made of every metal to be found in the mountain, fashioned into circles welded together and forming a halo around the hobbit's head, with a long moonstone in the shape of a tear hanging down at front to mark the center of Bilbo's forehead. The other accessories were hardly noticed, which was saying something given that he was surrounded by dwarves who would normally judge someone by the quality and style jewelry they wore. But no, that was not where their interest lay at the moment.

And then the hobbit finally reached the front, Thorin taking a step down to offer his hand to his intended, Bilbo taking it with a slightly nervous smile that morphed into a wide smile that lit up his
face brilliantly, having noticed the chain and ring now that he was closer.

Squeezing Bilbo's hand in response, Thorin wished his brain was working well enough to allow him to tell the hobbit how stunning he looked, keeping his mouth shut instead because he was fairly sure nothing but gibberish would come out. But he did manage a small smile, unaware of the warmth in his eyes that had a becoming pink blooming in Bilbo's formerly pale cheeks.

Thankfully the two had been grilled to within an inch of their lives as to what they were supposed to say and when to say it as the ceremony began, the words spoken to them having them say the correct responses like actors in a play, annunciation perfect on Bilbo's part as the two very convincingly projected the image of a couple completely bestowed with the other and with very little awareness of anything or anyone else.

Finally the royal marriage bracelets were presented, each man taking one and fastening it to the other's wrist as a physical reminder of the vows they'd just taken. More words were spoken by their officiate, and then they were called to share their first kiss as a married couple.

It was their first kiss period, both thought as they looked at each other for a somewhat embarrassing moment before Bilbo went up on tip toes and Thorin lowered his head, the kiss as brief and sweet as all first kisses should be before they pulled away at the loud reaction from their subjects.

After the wedding ceremony it was time for them to meet and greet the guests invited to the reception, Bilbo fiercely thankful that no one tried to head-butt him the way Thorin's closest companions did when it was their turn to congratulate them. As it was he got plenty of pats on the back that would have knocked him to the ground if not for the fact that he learned to brace himself when it was one of the dwarves he'd been introduced to previously. All in all the newly married couple were both relieved at the fact that even those who had made their disapproval of the marriage known were on their best behavior, Thorin's good mood lasting until he caught sight of his next well-wisher, who had apparently opted to let the majority of the crowd come through before coming forward.

King Thranduil of Mirkwood had only been invited because politics dictated he had to be. With tightly grinched teeth and muttered cursing on Thorin's part.

No doubt very aware of this, the elvish king was polite and brief in his congratulations, just as eager to get through the event so that he could leave as the dwarves were to see him go. The entourage behind the tall, handsome blond stood out like sore thumbs too.

Accepting the well wishes Thorin forced himself to be just as cordial, introducing the elf to his consort.

Taking the hand he was offered Bilbo thanked the elvish king for attending their wedding and for his well wishes, deliberately speaking in elvish so that he could demonstrate to Thorin that he hadn't been exaggerating the fact that he could speak it as well as any elf and was quite happy to talk to them and take any dealings with them off his husband's hands.

Impressed, the Mirkwood king asked where he'd learned, the two chatting for several minutes before Thorin couldn't stand it anymore and semi-politely pointed out that they were holding up the line.

"I look forward to speaking with you again." Thranduil informed Bilbo, turning his attention briefly to his closest attendant, who handed over several folded up pieces of parchment. Holding them out to Bilbo in return the elf explained that he'd been charged with delivering them to him.
Puzzled, Bilbo accepted the unexpected gift, his eyes widening as he realized what the parchment contained by the four sets of familiar handwriting. "Letters. Letters from my boys!"

"My son speaks very highly of your ward, and according to my sources they are all doing well at present." Brushing off the hobbit's thanks, the halfling did have an admirable grasp of his language, Thranduil again said his goodbyes, knowing it would be best that he leave the dwarf king's presence before the man's head exploded.

All smiles until he got a look at his husband's face, Bilbo winced a little and then turned his attention to shifting the letters to his left hand so that he could continue to greet their guests, doing his best to not appear eager to ditch everyone so that he could go off somewhere quiet and read the letters from his boys. He could trust that Sam at least would write an accurate account of what had happened thus far, Merry and Pippin's bound to be exaggerated, while Frodo wouldn't want him to worry.

Finally they'd welcomed everyone, the two able to head off to another room to remove some of their layers before they joined their guests. Thorin had more to deal with than Bilbo, who got to remove his cape but had to keep everything else on, and wanting to get back on the dwarf's good side Bilbo volunteered to help him remove his cape and some of the armor instead of sitting down and reading at least one of his letters.

Appreciating the offer, especially when anyone could see how eager Bilbo was to read the letters, Thorin declined, instead telling Bilbo to read his ward's letter. That would be about all the time they had before Balin came to get them.

"Thank you, Thorin."

"You're welcome."

Once it was time to head back to their guests Thorin offered to hold onto the letters for him since Bilbo's clothes didn't have any pockets, the hobbit handing them over with a grateful smile before surprising the dwarf by linking their hands together and giving his a squeeze.

Hand in hand they headed out of the room and braced for a night of food, dancing and politics.

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Note: No, the ring Bilbo gave Thorin is not, I repeat not, THE RING. That is currently on its way to being destroyed by the Fellowship. This is just a simple ring that's been in Bilbo's family for a while.
Note to regular readers: There won't be any updates next week because I'll be away on holidays. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year ahead of time, just in case!

When Balin finally signaled to him that he and Bilbo could finally leave the party Thorin was so grateful he actually smiled widely at the other dwarf before heading off to collect his consort, who was currently in a deep discussion with Ori. Coming up behind the hobbit Thorin apologized for interrupting since he was supposed to be on his best behavior and then informed Bilbo that it was time for them to make their exit. The party would continue on without them, naturally, but if they were going to give the impression of a true married couple it was best to seem more interested in each other than anyone else. Besides that they'd both been worked to the bone recently getting ready for this and he was fairly sure they could both use a few extra hours of sleep.

Mentally thinking the same Bilbo excused himself after promising to seek Ori out soon so that they could finish their discussion about hobbit marriage customs. Fairly sure he'd made a new friend Bilbo waved goodbye and then he allowed Thorin to gently herd him towards the exit, the two having to wait through a quick announcement over their exit and the applause and whistles that followed before they were allowed to leave.

The two remained quiet for the walk from the banquet hall to the royal residences, well aware of the guards with them and just plain tired on top of that. When they reached the hallways that led to their rooms Thorin dismissed the guards, the two of them shortly alone, finally.

"Well I think that went rather well, don't you?"

"As Dis didn't cut either of us to shreds with the sharp edge of her tongue I would agree."

Tempted to say that he was pretty sure all sides of Dis's tongue were equally sharp, Bilbo opted to hold it in since the woman in question was now his sister in law. He had in laws, the hobbit thought to himself, still in a daze over that. He was married. Actually married.

Stumbling at the thought Bilbo was grateful when Thorin grabbed him in time, steadying him on his feet as the dwarf assured him that there was only the beads to take care of and then they would both be able to retire for the evening.

And yes, that was another thing to try and wrap his head around, Bilbo acknowledged as he nodded automatically in return. Even though their marriage was to be in name only, which meant there was no reason to share a bed, he would be sleeping in Thorin's tonight. While later it wouldn't really matter, especially since there was no chance of heirs, they did have to give the illusion that the marriage had been consummated. The idea of sleeping in the same bed as Thorin made Bilbo the best kind of nervous, which was a problem given the fact that they would only be sleeping. But as pathetic as it was he'd take what he could get at the moment.

When they reached Bilbo's door Thorin opened it for him and then stated that Bilbo could enter through their connecting door when he was ready. And remembering the letters Bilbo had received Thorin retrieved them and handed them over to the hobbit, telling him that he could take the time to read them before coming if he liked.

Hoping that he wasn't blushing Bilbo nodded, assuring the dwarf that he wouldn't be long at all and
could wait until the next day to read them all through.

Leaving the hobbit with a nod Thorin headed to his door and went straight to his bedroom to start taking off all the cumbersome layers and accessories he'd had forced on him that morning. He piled it all up on a chair to be dealt with in the morning, storing the jewelry in a small chest on his dresser for safe keeping. That done he donned simply black trousers and the thin shirt he'd decided he should wear since his consort seemed to find the sight if his bare chest so distracting. And while that did stroke his ego somewhat, Thorin also saw no point in giving himself false hope or embarrassing the halfling further. Sleeping beside another man was probably a large blow to his husband's sense of decorum as it was.

He finished getting dressed just in time, Thorin not surprised when Bilbo gave a knock at the door before entering despite the earlier invitation to just enter. Walking over to answer the door himself Thorin was both relieved and disappointed to see that the other man wasn't wearing the sleep shirt that had seduced him before. The nightclothes the hobbit wore were similar to his own, though the top did appear to be too big for Bilbo, though there was no view of skin for him to appreciate this time.

"You had a lot to take off so I thought I should knock just in case." Bilbo explained shyly, fighting the urge to squirm and blush like a virgin. That was not something he'd been in a very long time and he and Thorin were not going to be doing anything to remind him of that fact so he needed to act like an adult about this.

It was on the tip of Thorin's tongue to point out that married couples should have some idea what the other looked like naked, but as he wasn't completely devoid of common sense he simply nodded and motioned for the hobbit to come further into his rooms.

Looking around with interest, this was his first time seeing the man's chambers for himself, Bilbo's first thought was that the space suited Thorin's personality. It was simple, sparse, and was in desperate need of some soft touches to make it more than just a place to sleep and store personal items in. Thorin wasn't the type to care about such things, but Bilbo had to admit that his fingers actually itched to do some decorating. But it was clean, and the warmth from the large fire in the fireplace was pleasant. Though not nearly as inviting as the very large bed that dominated the room and was proving quite difficult to ignore, a sly voice in Bilbo's head whispering all sorts of delicious things.

"It doesn't resemble your space but it serves its purpose." Having been in Bilbo's rooms a couple of times since the halfling had moved into the royal residence Thorin was well aware of the fact that the other man loved his bright colors and knickknacks. The halfling's rooms already looked more lived in and homey than his own, and the hobbit had barely moved in at this point.

"But it suits you, and that's what matters."

Not sure if that was a compliment or not Thorin simply inclined his head in agreement. His surroundings didn't matter to him so long as he was within the walls of his mountain.

Somewhat awkward silence descended then, both Bilbo and Thorin very aware of the bed in the room and both wishing that they weren't. But finally a small yawn escaped Bilbo's lips, reminding them both that they might as well quit dragging their feet before they ended up sleeping while standing.

"I have the beads for you on my bedside table."
Reaching into his pocket Bilbo pulled out the small case he'd been given that contained the six beads he would be gifting to Thorin too.

Thorin thought about pointing out that there were a small set of stairs on the other side of his bed that would help the hobbit be able to get into it more easily, but drawing attention to the difference in their size would most likely not go over well so instead he asked which side Bilbo would prefer, hoping that the odds would be in his favor.

Having already spotted the stairs while he was looking for something to talk about other than the bed Bilbo asked for the left since there was no way he was getting into the large piece of furniture on his own without something to stand on.

By unspoken agreement the two headed towards their respective sides of the bed then, the pair silently lecturing themselves to act their age the whole time as they got under the covers and then turned to face each other, both holding cases now.

Nerves got the best of Bilbo before either could begin the beading then. "This is a HUGE bed. Even you must feel small in it. You could probably fit seven dwarves in here, couldn't you?"

Thorin's raised eyebrow had Bilbo stuttering out an apology so fast only every couple of words were understandable.

"The most this bed has ever held to my knowledge is three. My siblings liked to wake me up for their amusement."

Bilbo's smile was shy but holding when he stated that when he'd been a mere hobbitling he'd desperately wanted siblings to play with. He's always thought they would be worth all the trouble they'd no doubt give him, as siblings were prone to do according to every person he'd ever met who had any.

"Well you have a sister of sorts in Dis, if you want her." Thorin's tone of voice made it clear he wouldn't be at all insulted if Bilbo would prefer to ignore that particular relationship. His sister loved him, he got that, but it was always her way or no way at all.

"I don't imagine she'd like that idea very much, but I'm sure once we have a chance to get used to each other we'll get along well enough." Hopefully.

He'd already told the hobbit that he was to come to him if Dis got to be too much to handle so Thorin didn't bother to say it again, especially since he knew Bilbo had every intention of ignoring the order no matter how many times it was issued. So instead he answered the other question from Bilbo's earlier remarks, which was yes, he did sometimes feel small in a bed this big.

Wanting desperately to offer to share it and make it feel less big Bilbo bit down on his bottom lip to keep the words from escaping. Even if he could somehow, someday, convince Thorin to treat him as a lover, that day certainly wasn't today. Pushing the matter would get him nowhere and his brain was already not working the best between the mental and physical strain of the wedding and the days leading up to it.

Absently running a hand through his curls, tousling them, Bilbo was well aware that putting beads into them wasn't going to be that easy a task. Also, he knew that both he and Thorin were supposed to be putting beads into each other's beards, which wasn't possible since he didn't have one and Thorin's was too short.

"Sorry again that my hair isn't quite...long enough." Bilbo offered lamely in the new silence that had
descended on them.

"As previously discussed long hair would not suit you."

Agreeing with that Bilbo watched Thorin open up the case that held the beads that would be going into his hair, the hobbit slowly shifting closer since they'd have to be within reaching distance to add the accessories to each other's hair.

Seeing no point in starting before he got a sense of what he was working with, his desire to touch the shiny curls playing a part as well, Thorin reached out to run his fingers through the fine curls that clung lovingly to his calloused skin. "So soft." He murmured, unaware he'd spoken aloud.

To distract himself from Thorin's words and touch Bilbo lifted his own hand to finger one of the braids already mixed into the dwarf's hair. He was just supposed to add the beads to them, the old ones already removed, which had disappointed him a little as he would have liked to have had an excuse to play with the other man's hair a little too.

"Does it matter who puts the beads on first?"

"Go ahead if you like." Normally tradition would have dictated he put the beads in first as the higher ranking male, but they were also supposed to be doing this naked too so some variances were already being allowed, Thorin thought ruefully to himself.

Opening the case he'd been given, though two of the beads in it had been bought by him for this purpose, Bilbo easily dealt with the task, which gave him something to concentrate on as opposed to how close they were together. He'd done his mother's hair for her plenty when she'd become too sick to do it herself, and she'd loved to wear it in very 'creative' ways, occasionally with beads.

The first beads on either side served the purpose of making it clear that the wearer was married and bonded to someone for the rest of their life together. They were family heirlooms, passed down the Durin line for centuries, and made of mithril. Next came the beads Bilbo had had made, which were white gold and engraved with the name of his maternal line on one and his paternal on the other. This was to proclaim to others what families Thorin had married into even though his family names didn't mean a thing to dwarves. The last set were blue sapphires that matched Thorin's eyes perfectly and Bilbo had been allowed to pick them out from a collection Dis had brought him to look over. The last beads were considered simply a gift and a sign of good luck for the new couple.

Holding a braid in each hand once he was done Bilbo eyed his handiwork, nodding in satisfaction when he decided that they were perfectly in place and secured well enough to guarantee they wouldn't come off accidentally.

"How do they look?" Thorin asked with a mixture of amusement and a soft emotion he couldn't quite place. It was adorable how proud the halfling was of his efforts, but the significance of this rite wasn't lost on him either.

"Perfect." Finally looking away from the beads to meet Thorin's gaze Bilbo lost his smug satisfaction pretty quickly, making him wish he could go back to playing with the beads and Thorin's hair instead of being so very aware again of how close to each other they were. And they still had to do his hair too, which had butterflies taking flight in his stomach as he nodded for Thorin to go ahead with the braiding.

The tension they both felt over their continued closeness didn't last long at all thanks to said braiding, the difficulty of getting Bilbo's hair to obey first frustrating and then amusing both men as Bilbo couldn't help but smile and then outright laugh at the faces Thorin was making, and even the dwarf
saw the humor in it after the first six failed attempts. Brushing aside the halfling's offers to help, he was going to get the honey curls to obey him somehow, Thorin eventually, after many do-overs, managed to make braids thick enough on either side to fit the beads.

Not wanting to push his luck at this point Thorin quickly added the beads, the top ones identical to Bilbo's, the second ones also made of mithril and bearing his own family names. Lastly were the moonstone beads, to match his consort's crown.

"They suit you." Thorin said when it was done and he could survey the results, pleased even as he wondered what Bilbo would make of the look once he had a chance to see himself in a mirror.

Reaching up to finger the beads himself Bilbo imagined that they'd get some taking used to, particularly since they would obviously be very annoying to do and undo in the future, but he would treasure them nonetheless. "I'll wear them proudly."

"As I will wear yours." Thorin replied, referring to both the beads and the ring he still wore on its chain around his neck, though it was under his shirt at the moment.

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Once the beads were in place and they had no reason to remain so close to the other both men awkwardly settled down for the night with plenty of space between them. In a stroke of brilliance Bilbo decided to tell Thorin all about the letter he'd read from Frodo, asking Thorin about the places his heir had mentioned, the unusual things the young hobbit had seen, and recounting a particularly humorous tale involving Merry and Pippin's latest, possibly greatest escapade to date. Naturally Thorin was a great deal more traveled than Bilbo, he'd had little choice in that matter, and had worked in plenty of villages and towns that were frequently traveled by those who had been all over Middle Earth because of their trade or wanderlust. So he had plenty of information to provide in return, as well as a true enjoyment at hearing the stories about Bilbo's 'boys'.

Hearing about their antics made him feel better about how Fili and Kili had turned out, Thorin silently thought to himself in quiet amusement, having been the closest thing to a father his nephews had had.

Eventually the conversation turned to what places Thorin had enjoyed seeing and experiencing most, their voices getting progressively more tired and quiet as Bilbo wormed the details out of Thorin, who wasn't used to talking as much as he was doing this evening. How long they talked neither would be able to remember come morning, though Bilbo was the first to drift off while Thorin absently described some truly excellent silver mines he'd gotten the use of a decade before.

Seeing that he'd lost his audience Thorin settled in to sleep as well, his head turned in the hobbit's direction so that he could watch Bilbo sleep as he too succumbed to slumber.
Brief Honeymoon

Normally Bilbo was a fairly deep sleeper, it rare for him to wake during the night unless some outside source interrupted his slumber in a way he couldn't ignore. So the hobbit couldn't have said why he woke up a few hours after he'd drifted off, his eyelashes rising sleepily as he blinked away sleep and attempted to comprehend what had woken him and why he felt instinctively that it was important for his mind to clear enough to properly understand where he was and why-oh.

Eyes widening in surprise Bilbo very slowly comprehended the fact that his head was tucked under Thorin's chin, their chests pressed against each other's with his hands resting on his husband's chest while Thorin's hand…Thorin's hand lay at the small of his back, keeping him in place with a gentle but firm hold. At his back and under his sleep shirt, Bilbo mentally corrected, swallowing hard as his senses were bombarded with sensations and realizations. How good Thorin smelled, the faint brush of the dwarf's hair against his own cheek, the calloused fingers pressed against his own, getting warmer by the second skin…and their hearts beating in time with each other's.

To say it had been a while since he'd shared a bed with anyone was a rather large understatement, even more so if one factored in how long it had been since he'd been properly held like this. Of course Thorin's size made this easier for him, but he would have never pictured the dwarf as the type who would hold anyone in their sleep. Because while he might have been the one to snuggle closer for the warmth or out of an unconscious desire to be closer to his husband, Bilbo couldn't see himself putting Thorin's hand where it was, especially without Thorin knowing it.

Not that he was silly enough to presume that Thorin knew who he held, Bilbo assured himself, squashing that hope under his metaphorical foot. Thorin probably had no idea what he'd done and this whole situation they found themselves in was purely accidental. They'd both been drawn to the other's warmth and-and Thorin's hand must have gotten especially cold and the dwarf had placed it where he had to warm it quicker through body heat. Yes, that was most likely it, the hobbit told himself firmly, even though it sounded vaguely stupid to him as he thought it. And really it didn't matter how they'd gotten in their present situation so much as what he should do now as he was awake and aware.

Every possibility Bilbo came up with struck the halfling as dangerous given he was dealing with a dwarf that had fought in countless battles, trekked through hostile environments on a daily basis, and had learned early to be suspicious of the trustworthiness of others. Not that he thought Thorin would attack him if he accidentally woke the dwarf up, it was the waking the no doubt light sleeper beside him that had him afraid to act. How would he explain their present circumstances? And what if Thorin did assume he was a threat and rolled them over and pinned him to the mattress and-it was better he not think about the ands that followed that thought.

Unable to come up with a sure fire plan, and admittedly he didn't really want to move from where he was, Bilbo decided that it would probably be best if he were just to will himself to go back to sleep. Thorin was a very early riser after all, and would no doubt wake up before him. The other man didn't have to know he'd ever woken up in the night and they could both just pretend this had never happened.

Yes, that would be the best approach by far, Bilbo decided as he resolutely closed his eyes and turned his attention to concentrating on the heart under his hand, allowing the steady thud to lull him back into sleep.
Normally Thorin wasn't a deep sleeper, nor did he tarry in bed for long come morning. Dark dreams and memories tended to haunt him when he was unconscious, and he had long ago trained his body to require very little sleep to function on. So it was with some surprise that Thorin woke that morning, feeling more refreshed and inclined to remain right where he was than he had in a very long time. Awareness came quickly too, being able to wake at a moment's notice having saved his life the King Under the Mountain countless times. That he wasn't alone in his bed registered quickly, followed swiftly by the knowledge of their current positions and the name of the smaller body cuddled up against his own.

Bilbo. His consort.

It was the hobbit's curls that clung and rubbed against his beard and under his chin, the soft skin of his consort's back that his fingers were splayed over to touch as much as possible. They fit so neatly together, Thorin marveled, Bilbo feeling so small and precious cuddled up against him.

Probably for warmth, his cynical, practical side pointed out, the halfling not yet used to the coolness within the mountain. But even so the hobbit had felt safe enough to come to him instead of bundling up more securely under the covers. He was glad of that.

Judging the deep, even breathing to mean that Bilbo was still very much asleep Thorin allowed his fingers to stroke the back he'd pressed them against again, allowing himself to enjoy the innocent enough caresses. He enjoyed it especially when his touch made Bilbo press more firmly against him, the hobbit's low sound of pleasure music to his sharp ears.

Empowered by the reaction Thorin allowed his hand to slip out from under Bilbo's shirt, lifting it up to stroke through his consort's curls, smiling over their messiness at the moment before turning his attention to the braid he'd struggled so hard to make in the hobbit's rebellious hair. A symbol, Thorin thought, proof that this tiny halfling belonged to him and no one else. Claimed and was claimed by him.

Balin had made it clear that the morning was his, and that he was to spend it with his consort. Customarily the whole day and a couple more at least would have been set aside for him to spend with Bilbo as newly wedded, their right even as royals. But that wasn't possible given the present social and political climate, it far too important that he be visibly out and about, putting his people first and making sure that Erebor continued on its road to regaining its former glory. For that matter many of his people were still not enamored with his choice in consort, he didn't want them to think he neglected them in favor of the hobbit and turn their anger on Bilbo.

He'd explained all this to Bilbo before the wedding, because even though their marriage wasn't a consummated one he hadn't wanted the other man to misunderstand his early departure today as a statement of dislike or disinterest in spending time with him. It would look, he knew, like he was slighting his consort in favor of his people and that wasn't the truth. If he could have remained here, just the two of them, he would have gladly. He could have used the break if nothing else and Bilbo knew that.

Bilbo had said he understood, but whether that was the case...he didn't know. And sighing over the fact Thorin continued to stroke his fingers through Bilbo's curls, his thoughts turning to ways he could make this all up to the hobbit later.

Eventually Thorin got up to use the bathroom, returning to find that Bilbo had quite literally cocooned himself in the bed's blankets in his absence, the sight startling a chuckle out of the dwarf as he shook his head at the sight.
Since he'd been replaced as his consort's heat source Thorin opted to retrieve some of the incredibly boring and tiresome paperwork Balin had dumped on him the day before, carrying it over to the bed with him. Settling in beside the hobbit Thorin leaned his back against the bed's large headboard and turned his attention to reading over the lengthy lists and requests for assistance from the various Guilds and prominent dwarf families.

It was after the sixth time Thorin questioned out loud as to just why he'd thought it was such a good idea to retake his kingdom and his throne that the dwarf was greeted with the sound of a muffled chuckle. Looking up from the parchment and them down Thorin met Bilbo's sleepy but awake eyes.

"Good morning, Consort."

"Good morning, Husband." A strange, almost ironic smile curved the hobbit's lips. "And that is not something I ever thought to say in my lifetime." The laugh that followed was both surprised and amused. "What are you working on already?"

"My penance, one could say, for losing myself to the gold fever and my need to retake this place at all costs. My people have returned to the mountain, and now they too want everything that it holds within its walls. Everyone's need is greater than the others."

"Like children around freshly baked cookies."

Thorin's eyebrows rose in confusion, which seemed to only amuse his hobbit that much more judging from the size of the other man's smile as Bilbo sat up beside him, copying his position so that his back was to the headboard as well.

"What I mean is, when you make fresh cookies everyone wants them, knowing they're best warm. But they can burn your tongues sometime, or the cookies crumbles because they haven't had time to set. That's why you have to keep them out of reach until it's safe and they can enjoy the treats properly."

"You would compare gold sickness to a desire for cookies?" Thorin couldn't begin to wrap his mind around that, much less decide if he was insulted or not.

The touch was light, but Thorin felt it like a blow to his chest when Bilbo set a hand on his thigh. "A starving man presented with food doesn't care about the taste or whether his wasted body can handle all that he gorges on. You were starved for this place, your home and birthright for decades. In your boots most would have done the same, though most would have failed or given up long ago. You won't lose your head again…and if nothing else you got me as a consolation prize." Bilbo finished, obviously trying to insert some humor.

"That is true." Keeping his touch light as well Thorin allowed himself one quick stroke through Bilbo's messy curls and then asked if the hobbit was hungry.

Allowing the change in subject Bilbo smiled and reminded Thorin that hobbits were always ready for a meal.

"How could I have forgotten."

"Good question."

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The next couple weeks went by fairly well, most everyone still in high spirits after the wedding and the festivities that had followed it. Both Thorin and Bilbo settled back into their earlier routines and
their separate beds, the two missing each other at night but naturally not saying so as they spent what little time they could eke out for their husband. Naturally Thorin was non-stop business from morning until night with his duties, and Bilbo split his time between his garden planning and assisting Ori in sorting through, rebinding, and discarding the massive amount of scrolls and books that lay damaged and uncared for in the city's Great Library. His new friend and the other dwarves who were in charge of the library had been shocked and distressed at the idea of their consort taking orders and doing actual work with them, but he'd brought them around eventually and he was fairly sure that eventually they would all be at least friendly, if not friends due to their love of books and learning if nothing else.

At first Thorin hadn't particularly liked the idea of Bilbo working in the library, he'd promised his consort a life of ease after all and he'd seen for himself how dirty and sore the hobbit was some nights when they'd shared dinner together.

In fact their first major argument as a married couple was over Bilbo's new 'job', Thorin forbidding him from continuing to work there and ordering him to focus solely on overseeing the construction of his garden without doing any real work there either. Bilbo had refused to be swayed and had stood as close to toe to toe with Thorin as his height allowed, the two arguing back and forth with Bilbo refusing to give so much as an inch. He was a hobbit, not a dwarf. Thorin was NOT his king and he would not obey unless it suited him too. And it didn't, so that was that. If Thorin didn't like that then that was his problem.

Neither man had talked to the other for three very long for everyone else days before Balin finally managed to find a compromise that worked, grudgingly, for both men. Bilbo continued to work in the library but he wasn't allowed to do any more heavy lifting or climb the very high ladders. Whichever bodyguard Bilbo had that day was allowed to oversee and enforce those rules if necessary.

It took a couple days after that for things to go back to normal but they did, both sure that there would be more arguments to come as they'd both come to the realization that they could be equally stubborn when their backs were up. The fact that they each thought the other beautiful when he was angry was of some consolation.

And so one afternoon, after finding out that Bilbo wasn't in the library anymore, Thorin headed for the hobbit's garden, having managed to squeeze out some time so that he could pay his consort a visit and see that he wasn't working too hard.

To his knowledge the garden construction was going very well, all the ash left behind by Smaug finally having some value as it was used to enrich the dirt brought in for the gardens. The groundwork had been laid out, so to speak, but only that thus far. That and the netting he'd had secured over the areas where there was potential for Bilbo to fall out of the room and down the mountain, though he'd wisely told the hobbit it was to keep outside dangers from getting in. The look the halfling had given him had made it clear he hadn't believed that, but Bilbo hadn't complained which had been of considerable relief to him.

Entering the room Thorin's first thought was that only Bilbo and the halfling's bodyguard were there, his second that he'd been wrong when he looked down at what was currently holding his consort's attention. His third thought was utter disbelief at what he was seeing.

The six creatures that were currently gathered around his consort were new to the mountain in that they hadn't been in residence before Smaug had taken Erebor. During the dragon's reign over the mountain the dirty colored pests had apparently moved in, staying behind and hiding from the dwarves when they weren't sneaking food or stealing odds and ends and ends they'd taken a fancy to. The
annoying creatures were about the size of a human man's hand from wrist to fingertips, tear shaped and seeming to consist completely of smooth fur with no sign of face or even eyes. They had four stumpy little legs underneath them, and yet they could jump high and move with incredible speed when they wanted to which made them hard to catch.

Apparently, Thorin thought as he moved further into the room, they should be bribing the things with bits of cheese buns.

They sensed and saw him before Bilbo did, though the bodyguard had known the instant his king had entered the room, and with squeaks and grumbles they deserted the hobbit, racing for one of the cracks in the wall that was just their size but would allow no one to pursue them.

Turning his head to see the reason for their desertion Bilbo smiled at the sight of his husband, pleased to see him even though he was sorry to see his little friends go. Since he had brought the old cheese buns for them in the first place Bilbo tossed what was left near the hole so that they could get it later and then he turned all his attention to Thorin.

"Hello. Come to make sure I'm not working too hard?"

"Simply passing through. Are you making it a habit to feed those things?"

It took Bilbo a moment to realize the 'things' were his little friends. "My dust bunnies? Sometimes. Why?" Suspicion came into the hobbit's eyes, his body language convey the displeasure that would follow if he was forbidden from feeding the creatures.

"Dust bunnies? That's what you've named them?" Thus far they all just referred to them as 'the pests' or 'infestation'.

"They're the color of dust and they love to bounce around like rabbits. It seemed appropriate. Why? Do you know their proper name? I asked but no one in the library knew anything about them."

Aside from the fact that the other residents in the mountain didn't like them very much, Bilbo silently tacked on.

Wisely Thorin stated that no, he had no idea if the 'dust bunnies' had another name in other parts of the world. He had never encountered them before returning to the mountain.

"Well maybe when the garden is all complete they'll spend most of their time here and less time getting in the way of construction or whatever else they're doing that makes you dwarves so angry at them." Though how the dwarves could not find his dust bunnies adorable was beyond him. The way they purred when you pet them and did twists and flips in the air when they jumped was great fun to watch.

Then again he was living with men who thought beards were attractive on women.

His idea of sweet and adorable and theirs probably differed quite a bit.
Happy Valentine's Day!

Too Hot To Handle

The day that would be talked about all over Erebor for the weeks that followed started fairly ordinarily save for the fact that Bilbo awoke with an overwhelming craving for some of his special chili. Now it wasn't rare for hobbits to be obsessed with food, that was in fact fairly normal, but in this case Bilbo didn't have a kitchen he could use easily because it was his alone. So he tried to ignore the craving, but by the end of breakfast Bilbo knew that he was going to have to visit the royal kitchens and convince the dwarves that worked there to let him make his own dinner for the night.

Naturally the cooks couldn't say no to him, he was their consort after all, and while their backs did go a little up at the idea that the hobbit wouldn't allow them to make this chili for him, they were willing to let that go because hobbits were strange creatures and they knew their food was superior. No, what had them all riled up was the halfing's offhanded comment about how they could continue with whatever they'd planned for that evening's meal for the rest of the royal family because he knew his chili would be too hot and spicy for them.

The idea that a hobbit could eat something a dwarf couldn't was a major insult as far as they were concerned, and the cooks wasted no time once Bilbo had left the kitchen in spreading the perceived slander to the other servants, who of course had to tell everyone that they encountered about what the consort's had said.

Having left his chili to slowly simmer in the kitchen when he was done, the cooks had promised to keep an eye on it, Bilbo had headed to the library afterwards and was completely unaware of the gossip storm he'd caused, which got worse by the minute as his words were twisted and added to. It went from a warning about the heat, to the hobbit suggesting that dwarves could only eat bland food because their stomachs were too delicate, to the suggestion that hobbits were stronger than dwarves, who would have never taken back the mountain without the help of the halflings.

And so it was shortly after lunch when Thorin heard about it from his nephews and sister, the three talking over each other as they ranted and raved about how Bilbo was maligning their race and their personal outrage over that fact. Balin and Dwalin were with him at the time, the latter being equally upset while Thorin and Balin had the sense to question where the other members of the royal family had gotten their information.

To say it took some doing to quiet the three, particularly Dis, was an understatement, but finally Thorin managed it and in the blessed silence stated that he was sure there was some sort of misunderstanding. At the very least they should hear Bilbo's side of the story before they jumped to conclusions.

Fili and Kili took this to mean they should go ambush their hobbit uncle in the library, Dis agreeing that that was an excellent idea.

For the sake of peace under the mountain and in his home Thorin was reduced to following after them at a very fast walk with Balin and Dwalin at his heels, as well as the guards assigned to him. He also had to threaten the boys and his sister with the idea of letting Bilbo add a great deal of vegetables to their diets if they didn't let him talk to the hobbit first, which worked beautifully.
Thank Mahal for their hatred of green vegetables.

To say that Bilbo was taken aback by the sudden visit of his new family would be an understatement, especially since his nephews were giving him suspicious looks and Dis…well that look was fairly standard where he was concerned so that was nothing new. Dwalin was giving him a hard look which was admittedly scary as well, but Bilbo trusted that Thorin would keep the intimidating dwarf in line if need be. And just in case he moved closer to Thorin as he asked why they'd all come to the library. Durins were not big on books after all, though he didn't say that as he gave Thorin his full attention. He had a feeling saying as little as possible was in his best interests at the moment.

"It's a long story, but I will explain. First though, you made your own dinner for tonight?"

Very confused as to what that had to do with anything Bilbo slowly nodded his head. "Yes. Why? Oh-did I offend the cooks? They didn't look upset and I told them I enjoy their cooking very much. I just had a craving for my chili." Bilbo frowned in distress, not liking the idea that he'd hurt someone's feelings. Other than their complete lack of understanding about seasoning and the importance of vegetables, the royal cooks were quite skilled at their jobs as far as dwarves went.

"As far as I know your request to cook did not offend them."

"Oh good."

"Would I be correct in assuming you made something that isn't commonly made by my people?"

"Of course. If it were otherwise I'd have made enough for everyone. But as I told the cooks, chili, especially as I'm using the Took recipe, is much too hot and spicy for people who aren't used to it. Of course the Brandybucks make an even spicier version…I can hardly handle more than a couple bowls of theirs."

"We could eat it!" That was Kili.

"Anything a hobbit can eat, we can eat." Fili.

"Well of course you could eat it, Boys-it just wouldn't end well." That was the best way Bilbo knew how to put it. "I myself can't eat these meat pies my grandmother makes anymore, just the smell makes me nauseated. Not that they don't smell wonderful, they do, but unfortunately there was an occasion in my youth when she wasn't aware that one of the main ingredients had gone bad and I was quite ill as a result. I haven't been able to stomach one since."

In perfect unison the princes stated that if Bilbo could eat it, they could eat it.

"My sons have very strong stomachs."

Seeing where this was going Thorin cut off the brewing argument by asking Bilbo if he would allow the two to sample his chili so that they would understand why he was telling them it was a bad idea. They wouldn't learn any other way.

Opening his mouth to argue, he didn't want them to burn their tongues or get indigestion after all, Bilbo wisely shut it again and agreed to the suggestion.

In the end there were six taste testers that night. The princes, Dwalin, and the three cooks who were responsible for the rumors that were currently traveling up and down the mountain about their
consort all found themselves sitting in a line at the royal table with emotions ranging from eagerness to fear. Those who worked directly for the royal family were expected to be as protective of their rulers’ privacy as they were good at their jobs. These cooks had failed. And since Thorin was fairly sure his consort was right about how his people would react to the chili Thorin figured it was only fair that part of their punishment be trying the chili and then being expected to report back to everyone they met how right their consort had been.

So that Bilbo didn't lose all his chili, the poor hobbit deserved his treat after all this after all, each dwarf was given a decent sized spoon with some chili on it and a very large glass of water. Bilbo had insisted on the water while Thorin had thought they didn't deserve any. As a compromise the glasses weren't the pitchers of water Bilbo had wanted for them.

Wringing his hands Bilbo stood beside Thorin, Dis on the other side of the King Under the Mountain who gave the order for them to put their spoons where their mouths were.

"Oh dear."

It was for the best that Bilbo didn't know enough Khuzdul to understand the foulness of the language being used in front of him a second later as the majority of the dwarves cursed the toxic, hell's fire witch's brew they'd just placed on their tongues. Dwalin, ironically, was the one struck speechless, while the others alternated between guzzling water and more cursing, than demanding more water since they'd gone through theirs. And of course they couldn't get that fast enough so they went for the tankers full of ale instead, which only made the burning worse.

Sure that their points had now been made Thorin gently prodded his very horrified hobbit into his seat and then took the one beside his consort instead of his usual seat. Then he helped himself to a small bowl of Bilbo's chili, more amused than insulted when Bilbo's hand shot out to grab his wrist, obviously trying to spare him at least.

"Unlike the rest of them I spent enough time around Men to grow used to their habit of spicing up their food. I could not afford to offend by being picky, and developed an immunity to over seasoning of food."

The pained expression Bilbo gave him pleaded with him not to try, but Thorin wasn't about to change his mind and the hobbit obviously realized that because he let go, the princes not helping as they loudly declared in between their swearing and drinking that their uncle would most certainly be the one who could eat the molten lava food without injury. Dis wasn't so sure this wasn't a poisoning plot and advised against it too.

Scooping up a spoonful, Thorin swallowed the seemingly harmless looking concoction…and had to use the same sort of mindset he would if tortured to keep himself from expressing even a hint of discomfort as he reached for the glass of water Bilbo had poured and put in front of him, carefully chugging it down to put out the dragon's fire running down his throat. And the next two glasses Bilbo poured for him met a similar fate, Thorin refusing the forth out of principle.

"Dwarves." Shaking his head as he sighed over the lot of them, not to mention desperately hungry at this point and annoyed with the waste of his food, Bilbo spooned up some of his own chili and started eating, sighing outloud again over the fact that it just wasn't the same without fresh from the garden produce. But he wasn't about to let it go to waste either, the hobbit a quarter of the way through his bowl before he couldn't help but stop due to the eerie stillness of the room and the fact that everyone else in it was staring at him.

That his nephews were looking at him in shocked awe was a little…flattering, while the other four testers across from him and Dis wore expressions that would suggest they saw him as a strange
creature they couldn't begin to phantom. At his side Thorin looked faintly amused, so at least he hadn't horrified his husband. But still…

"I think you all should get to your own dinner before it gets too cold."

Pushing aside the cloth that had been set over the spicy corn bread he'd made to go with his chili Bilbo went about buttering a slice for himself and then stated, just in case it needed to be said, that the bread would also be hot, though not nearly as spicy as the chili if anyone else wanted some.

No one but Thorin took a piece as the cooks went about serving the planned meal and then beat a hasty retreat from the room, knowing that their jobs depending on them spreading the news far and wide throughout the mountain that they'd been very, very wrong about their consort.

Hobbits, they'd learned, like to consume food that produced more heat than the average dragon.

) It was late that night when Thorin heard the hesitant knock on the door that led to the bathroom he shared with his consort, making it very clear who wished an audience with him. And that being the case Thorin got up from his chair in front of the fireplace and walked over to open that door for his hobbit, who was dressed in the same sleep clothes he'd worn their one night together. "Good evening."

"Good evening." Was Bilbo's absentminded response, the hobbit looking him up and down and appearing relieved by whatever he saw.

Since he had no wish to hurry Bilbo away Thorin didn't attempt to ask what had brought the hobbit to his rooms, simply enjoying the other man's presence until Bilbo caught himself and started blushing and stammering before finally getting out his reason for showing up.

Apparently Kili had visited him a short time ago suffering from a terrible stomachache and hoping that Bilbo would have something that would help. He'd given the boy something that he hoped would help, giving him extra for Fili in case he needed it, and then had gone back to bed. But he hadn't been able to sleep wondering if Thorin was ill too but too stubborn to admit that he was suffering any ill effects.

Ah, that explained the relieved look he'd gotten. Just before dinner had ended Kili had gotten it into his head to try the chili one last time, sure that this time he could handle it, and that had not ended well. The little idiot hadn't even waited for more water to be fetched and had ended up spazzing about in his chair like a caught fish, tipping out of said chair, breaking it, and ending the night with a lump the size of a baby's fist on his forehead and Bilbo wringing his hands like mad.

"I'm fine."

"I'm glad." Pause. "Are you sure you're all right though? Maybe I should get you some medicine just in case."

Opting not to be insulted, the hobbit had had a trying evening in every sense of the word, Thorin gave Bilbo what he hoped was a reassuring shoulder squeeze. "There's no need."

"But."

"If it will make you rest easier you can sleep in here so that if I need you you'll know." The words were out of Thorin's mouth before he'd thought them through, fueled more by a desire to get the hobbit back into his bed than any concern he might have about suddenly developing a stomach ache.
He'd enjoyed the spicy bread, actually, and hoped Bilbo would make it again.

Surprise, then emotions passing too quickly for him to recognize showed in Bilbo's eyes.

"That would probably be for the best." The hobbit said after a telling moment's silence. "After all, if you were to get ill tonight I wouldn't be able to hear you calling for my help. Our bedrooms are too far away."

Blinking in surprise, that was not the response he'd been expecting, Thorin had to take a moment of his own before turning to motion towards his bed.

"I'll...uhm...get the supplies you might need from my room and then be right back."

Watching the hobbit beat a hasty retreat Thorin waited until the door had closed before belatedly getting ready for bed as quickly as possible, throwing on similar attire to what he'd worn on their wedding night as well. When that was done he headed for his bed, thinking to spend as much time in it with his consort as possible. The steps on Bilbo's side of the bed were still there, he'd seen to that.

Moments later Bilbo was back, walking over to set a small bag of supplies and a glass of water on the table beside the bed. That done the hobbit was up the stairs quickly, sliding under the covers and then turning over to sleep on his side, facing Thorin.

As it would be a couple more hours before he could sleep, he was a night owl by nature, Thorin tried to think of something to say, the nerves and guilt on the hobbit's face clueing him in to the most logical target. "You know what happened today was not your fault."

"If I hadn't-"

"No. You are my consort, second in this mountain only to me. If you want to eat that chili concoction of yours every day of your life then you shall. Those who speak badly of you disrespect and insult me as your husband. That is not something I will tolerate."

"I'm a hobbit, it's only natural that they be uncomfortable with the idea of me as...a member of your family."

Reaching out Thorin grasped Bilbo by the chin, his fingers splaying out to cup the hobbit's cheek as he spoke firmly and with absolutely certainty. "If your place as my consort makes any of my subjects uncomfortable they can leave. You will stand at my side until one of us passes into the next life, and I will remove any who wish you harm of any kind. I am King Under the Mountain, here my word is law."

"They have the right to be offended and angry on your behalf for being forced into the agreement with my people for their sake, Thorin."

"I chose you." Was his reply. "And they will accept you or they will leave. Those are their only options."

A slow, hesitant smile curved Bilbo's lips as he stated that at least he'd earned some respect from Fili, Kili and Dwalin with this whole fiasco. Even if they were only impressed that he could eat something they couldn't.

Chuckling roughly, Thorin inclined his head in agreement.

"Is Kili always so-foolhardy and stubborn?"
"Yes." And with a shake of his head Thorin decided that since Bilbo had entertained him so with stories of his boys' escapades he could return the favor by describing some of Kili's spectacular demonstrations when it came to the boy's complete lack of common sense and misplaced stubbornness.

And so they spent the next couple of hours discussing the young charges in their lives, eventually slipping into slumber as before- waking up in the morning to find themselves cuddled up against each other once again in the middle of the bed.

As before both pretended it hadn't happened, neither aware that they'd shared a bed that night for the exact same reason.

Because they'd wanted to.
Because I'm The King

Note: A new character introduced here has to do with my love of using characters multiple times in various fanfics. If you recognize this version of him thanks for reading 'Share My Dream'.

Because I'm The King

As Bilbo had sensed, the chili fiasco did win him some points with his two nephews, though it led to a situation he most definitely hadn't seen coming. Rather than learning from their brush with foods they were told they couldn't handle, the two dwarf brothers decided that it would be their new goal in life to conquer the foods hobbits ate. To their way of thinking there could not be something in the world that they couldn't eat, especially if hobbits could, and so they started asking Bilbo to make them food that hobbits ate to build up their immunity to these strange dishes.

Unfortunately the problem with their request, as he explained to them, was that the more 'exotic' foods they weren't used to included ingredients that weren't to be found within their mountain. The dwarves reputation for being vegetation haters was well known, the people of Dale and other traveling vendors knowing well not to even try to sell that kind of produce to them. So while he could make them variations of the recipes he'd grown up with, they would not be authentic hobbit dishes without spices and vegetables that couldn't currently be found in Erebor.

But at least some of them could be found in Dale, they argued, and the brothers immediately suggested that they send for whatever Bilbo needed to be brought to the mountain for their use. Naturally the hobbit had had to shoot that idea down as soon as it was made because, as he tried to explain to them even though they knew nothing of cooking, which made it difficult, that one had to be careful about buying food, and a smart man never bought anything unseen when you were talking about the sorts of things he'd wish to buy. And for that matter, he didn't know the stores in Dale well enough to point anyone in the right direction. He'd grown the majority of his own food or traded for things from neighbors or traveling vendors.

Not to be deterred Fili and Kili turned their attention to their uncle, requesting that they be allowed to escort Bilbo down to Dale so that he could find the foods hobbits ate that dwarves did not.

Thorin wasn't thrilled by the idea, but the boys weren't complete fools and pointed out that it would no doubt make their new uncle very happy if there was more hobbit food in Erebor. They wanted to keep their hobbit happy and well fed, didn't they?

Well aware that they were trying to manipulate him, he knew all their tells after all and had many a year on them, but Thorin was willing to admit that they had a point, and he did want to keep his hobbit happy. But he was not about to entrust Bilbo's safety to them when their relations with the people of Dale was still...precarious at times. So instead he told them that they would have to wait a couple weeks and then he would take Bilbo with him when he went to Dale on business.

Their nature being what it was neither brother was keen to have to wait that long, but Bilbo was delighted by the news and made it clear he was looking forward to the trip.

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It was the afternoon before the trip when Thorin went looking for Bilbo, a question Balin had posed to him that morning requiring him to consult with his consort since the other man would know better than he the answer. He found the hobbit in his 'garden' area, sitting on the stone bench he'd ordered brought in so that he wouldn't constantly come into the room to find Bilbo sitting in the dirt. His
hobbit was a consort to the king after all, and should at the very least always have something to sit on. Dismissing his consort's guard so that they could be alone, Thorin waited until the door closed before starting across the dirt covered room.

The dust bunnies Bilbo had been playing with scattered at the sight of him, as they always did, but Bilbo greeted him with a wide smile anyway, always happy to see him it seemed, which always warmed him. It also made him want to smile back, though he reined the urge in and simply nodded his head in acknowledgement.

Getting to his feet Bilbo fought the urge to straighten his clothes as he greeted his husband and asked him what had brought him by.

"I have a quick question for you regarding tomorrow's trip to Dale."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Approximately how much do you anticipate spending so that I can have that amount retrieved from one of our bank vaults."

"I see. But there's no need for you to take any gold out, I've already taken care of it."

"Fili and Kili are paying for it?" That was a surprise, he wouldn't have thought that the two would think to offer even though Bilbo was doing this largely for their benefit. He was actually rather proud of them, and made a mental note to tell them so when he saw them next.

"No, I mean I've already put aside some of my gold for it. I counted it out yesterday."

"Your...no. You are my consort; I will pay for your purchases."

"But that's not necessary. I-wait..." The hobbit's eyes took on a warning gleam that indicated stormy weather ahead. "Are you suggesting that you want to pay for all my future purchases? That you think because we're married I'm going to be...be kept?!"

They might have only been married for a short time, but Thorin knew that tone and the consequences when it was used. But be that as it may..."Before we were married I told you that I would take care of you. That I would provide you with everything that you might need to be happy here. Therefore yes, I will pay for anything you need in Dale or anywhere else. But you are not being kept because what's mine is yours."

"Then by the same token what's mine is yours as well, so using my coins instead of yours should be acceptable too."

"No."

"Thorin..."

"No."

Watching Bilbo's hands go to his hips, it was wrong of him to find it so adorable but Thorin couldn't help it, the dwarf king prepared for another argument of possibly epic proportion, figuring they were probably due anyway. It certainly kept things interesting.

But after taking a few very deep, apparently calming breathes Bilbo regained enough composure to speak normally. "Since your thick dwarf skull prevents you from seeing the error in your thinking, allow me to put this another way. Less than a year ago you were a king, but one with no kingdom or
the wealth that came with said kingdom. So a year ago, had we met and fallen for each other and
gotten married and all that, I would have been the wealthier of the two of us. And that being the case,
would you have allowed me to buy you everything you needed? Allowed your family, friends and
neighbors see you as the sort who would live that way? Hmmm?"

"Hobbits don't marry their own gender."

Bilbo pinched the bridge of his nose. "That's not the point, Thorin, though yes, the ceremony would
have been according to your traditions, not ours. Now just admit I'm right and save us both the
aching heads."

"You are not a king, Bilbo Baggins. Different rules apply."

"And I've told you more than once that I did not accept your proposal for this cushy life you seem to
think I should want. I am a hobbit, Thorin, we are not lazy creatures, nor are we the sort who need to
be pampered and taken care of. I know you have a very large need to take care of your people, it's
what will make you one of the best kings to ever rule Under the Mountain, but I am not one of your
subjects."

Even though he knew it wouldn't do any good Thorin moved in closer, deliberately towering over
Bilbo as much as he was able to, not remotely surprised when the hobbit got up on tip toes to make
the difference barely noticeable. "You became my subject when you married me."

"I became your husband, Thorin Oakenshield. And I'm as much the king of you as you are of me."

Completely flabbergasted, the idea was so ludicrous he couldn't wrap his mind around it, Thorin
found himself utterly speechless for several moments, and then he found his voice and it came out as
a roar. "I am your king and husband, you will obey me!"

"And I am a Baggins of Bag End," Bilbo shot back snottily. "But my mother was also TOOK. And
angering a Took is NEVER a wise choice."

"Are you threatening me, Halfling?"

"Well I do know where you sleep, don't I?"

Restraining himself from making the strangling motions he wanted to, Thorin indulged himself a little
by muttering several sentences in his native tongue that revolved around what he would like to do to
the infuriating hobbit he was married to. His thoughts and mental imagery took a very distracting turn
when he got to the part about putting Bilbo over his knee and giving the halfling the spanking he was
asking for. Thankfully his hobbit didn't like being ignored, the finger poking his chest repeatedly
drawing his attention back to the present.

"Stop that."

"Then stop saying things about me in a language I don't understand. And you still have to arrange for
me to have lessons so I can understand. I'm your people's consort and I should be able to speak their
language."

"In case you need to rule in my stead because you know where I sleep?"

"Oh please. This mountain would come crashing down on both our heads before any dwarf would
consent to being ruled over by a hobbit. They'd throw themselves into bottomless crevices first."

He couldn't help it, his lips twitched at the new pictures Bilbo was painting in his head, seeing dwarf
after dwarf plummet to his or her death like lemmings rather than be ruled by his consort. Which he shouldn't find funny, Thorin silently acknowledged, but Bilbo had a gift when it came to making him imagine the unimaginable.

"Then for the sake of your conscience I believe you'll let me live."

"And you'll let me use my own gold tomorrow."

"No."

Bilbo said his name like it was a curse.

"What you said before, do you think I want my subjects to see that I'm using your gold to pay for things?"

The halfling opened his mouth and then closed it, repeating the actions three times before his face settled into considering lines.

"Ah. Darn. You have a point." A slightly longer pause. "Alright...how about...I give you the money I was going to spend tomorrow and you put it in this vault we apparently have. Then you can take out the same amount in your gold and we'll use that tomorrow."

Considering it, and deciding that it was agreeable since he'd never use the coins Bilbo intended to give him, Thorin agreed to the plan.

"I'll give you the coins after dinner then."


The next day was perfect in Bilbo's eyes, with the sun shining brightly, the sky as blue as Thorin's eyes, and the scents of nature filling his nose and making him very tempted to wiggling with glee on the pony he'd been assigned to ride. The fact that he was surrounded by dwarves who liked the outdoors about as much as they liked bad beard cuts was a slight damper, but one he found he could ignore that easily enough. He was outside, and would be outside for hours. That alone made Bilbo want to dance like his Took grandfather after he'd had far too much to drink. He was restraining that urge for the time being, but he let himself hum the tune he wished he was dancing to.

He didn't even mind the fact that he had to wear his crown.

They made it to Dale in good time, Bard meeting them on the outskirts as planned. It was obvious he was surprised to see that Thorin had brought his consort and so many extra guards, but nodded in understanding when it was explained that this was also to be a buying expedition and that Bilbo would be taking care of that aspect while the meeting went on. He even had some suggestions of where Bilbo should start and who he could ask about some of the harder to find items on his list.

And so it was that they separated once they had arrived in Dale, Bilbo actually grateful to be surrounded by dwarves who were taller than him because they blocked him mostly from view and insured that the people staring at him wasn't as nerve-wracking as it would be otherwise. When he actually went into the shops it was more of a problem, but thankfully the dwarves with him were smart enough not to all come in after the first couple of times they failed to all fit.

Of course they were also of the opinion that he should buy the stores out of the stuff he wanted so that they wouldn't have to come here for the green stuff regularly, having no concept of the shelf life of many of the items he was getting. And since the dwarves didn't want to deal with the shopkeepers of Dale directly, even when they tried to explain such things to them, it fell on Bilbo's shoulders to
do so.

Anyway, to Bilbo's surprised pleasure, the vendors had the majority of the things he was looking for, though certainly not as good as the produce he would have found in his own gardens back at Bag End. But still, he had most of what he wanted and was about to give up on the rest so that he would arrive back at the meeting point on time when he heard his name being called by a very familiar voice.

"Let the elf who just spoke through."

None of the dwarves moved.

"I am your consort and I am ordering you to let Arthur through."

Still not moving.

Not about to back down Bilbo wiggled through the guards, the dwarves he came in contact with automatically moving back because they sure as Mahal didn't want to be the one to break their king's weak little hobbit. Just the idea of what their ruler would do to them if they so much as put a bruise on the creature was enough to have them sweating in their armor.

So Bilbo got through and Arthur, nephew of the King of Mirkwood, dropped gracefully to one knee to give him a warm hug of greeting, both naturally speaking Elvish to each other even if it did annoy the dwarves around them.

"Congratulations on your wedding, my friend. I'm sorry I got word of it too late to attend."

"I thought you and your uncle weren't speaking." Returning the hug Bilbo smiled over the fact that his friend remained as he was so that he didn't tower over him. Such consideration was something he'd always liked about Arthur.

"The King of Mirkwood and I have not spoken in two hundred and seven years, true, but I would have still attended and let my uncle be the one to stew over my presence. Especially since his true quarrel is with my mother, not I."

When you lived as long as elves did, sibling fights could last a really long time, Bilbo thought but didn't say, instead changing to the subject of whether or not Arthur had heard about the quest Frodo and his other boys were currently on with Arthur's cousin, Legolas.

"I have. He'll take good care of them, it's his nature. Or it was when last they spoke." Their parents had forbidden them to talk to each other, and Legolas was a stickler for that sort of thing.

"Consort. We should be leaving now."

Looking at his bodyguard, one of the few that would stand toe to toe with him so to speak, Bilbo nodded and then asked if Arthur would walk with him on his way back to meet Thorin so that he could introduce the two of them to each other.

"We've met, but I would be happy to walk with you all."

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Having finished their meeting Thorin waited outside with Bard, not terribly pleased when he finally spotted his party coming with one very obvious addition to the group given the elf's height. He recognized this one too, thought the pointy-earred pretty boys tended to look a lot alike. Thranduil's
nephew. The historian who traveled all over Middle Earth seeking to learn the history, languages and stories of every society he came across. When they'd crossed paths after Smaug he’d told the elf exactly what had happened, including his uncle's cowardice, and the elf had simply listened, recorded his version, and then thanked him for his time. When he'd said that if someone maligned a member of his family the way he'd just done he'd slit the offender's throat, the elf had simply shaken his head and then pointed out that if he were to follow that principle he'd have to kill what was left of Thorin's people already. And he was fairly sure Thorin wouldn't like that.

Needless to say he wasn't terribly fond of this elf…but he'd met a lot worse in his lifetime.

Those of his men in front of the two moved off to allow Bilbo to hurry over towards him, the elf following two strides behind him with an easy smile on his lips.

And then the elf was whirling around, white blond hair flying as he yelled for Bilbo to get down just before he snatched the arrow flying straight for his friend out of the air and drawing his own bow sent it flying straight back where it had come from.

Thorin reached Bilbo as that arrow flew, standing between his currently flat to the ground consort and the possible threat with his sword drawn, while the elf pointed one of his own arrows in the same direction he'd sent the first, eyes searching for any other possible threat while the dwarf guards moved to protect the royal family and Bard and his men did the same to avoid this political disaster becoming worse.

"I see no other threat. His attacker has gone to face his maker's judgement."

"You're sure?" Thorin demanded to know.

The elf looked over his shoulder, a superior smirk on his lips. "I do not miss, King Under the Mountain."
Getting A Clue

As soon as Arthur's words registered Bilbo all but leapt to his feet, glad that Thorin had turned to face him as well so that he could wrap his arms around his husband's waist and hug him hard, relief and lingering fear and adrenaline all mixing together in his system. But Thorin was alright, as was Arthur and everyone else but the individual who'd just tried to assassinate Thorin. And he was very, very glad Arthur had shot him or her, even if that was a horrible thought to have. He didn't care. If he'd had the knowledge and skill he'd have shot the goblin like person himself.

"Thank all the creators that arrow didn't hit you." Nuzzling his face against Thorin's chest Bilbo didn't care that he was possibly embarrassing the dwarf, or that he probably looked a little ridiculous clinging to the man like a child. He wasn't like them, he wasn't used to being in situations where people he cared about were nearly murdered in front of him.

"I wasn't the one he was aiming for." A grim look on his face Thorin kept his sword in hand, though the other was wrapped around Bilbo's waist protectively, needing he contact just as much as Bilbo did at the moment. "He was aiming for you."

"But that's-he must have just had terrible aim if it would have hit me. Why would anyone want to shoot me?" Bilbo shook his head, not believing it for a second. After all, the only one he fought with somewhat regularly was Thorin, and he was pretty sure his husband wasn't trying to kill him. Or if he was Thorin would at least have done it himself, rather than hire someone.

"One doesn't hire someone that stupid to assassinate a king. Given your height and proximity to me, he should have waited until you were on your way back to the mountain, elevated by your mount and with less people around to see the attack coming." Arthur voice was cold as he returned his arrow to its quiver and then moved to where Thorin could see him. "Do you wish me to retrieve the body, or stay here and protect Bilbo while you and your men do so?"

Thorin's face made it clear he didn't like either of those two choices.

"What race was the shooter?" Bard asked, hoping like mad that it wasn't one of his people. But the elves would be more cunning and upfront given the target, and dwarves were rarely interested in archery. The halfling's own people depended on others for their protection, and it was unlikely a member of one of the dark races had managed to infiltrate his town without being noticed. Ergo, the most logical conclusion was-

"Of your race, I believe. He was wearing a hood though, which masked his features well."

Now Thorin's dark look was in Bard's direction.

"Harming your consort would lead to more bloodshed and destruction." Was the leader of Dale's response to this latest death glare. "My people have suffered enough. I give you my word that this was done without my knowledge, and I will gladly join you in hunting down anyone who was involved."

Getting a good grip on the back of Thorin's tunic Bilbo gave it a hard tug to get the dwarf's attention. "Let Arthur go and get the man, though sends some guards with him just in case someone else is there and tries to hurt him. There could be an ambush waiting. Not that I want anything to happen to you either, Arthur, but-" Bilbo didn't finish the sentence, his cheeks reddening as his eyes conveyed
what he wasn't about to say in front of everyone else.

Not bothered in the least, Arthur smiled in understanding, nodding his head ever so slightly.

Thorin didn't like any of the options available to him. He didn't want to leave his consort's side, but he also couldn't take Bilbo with him in case he would be walking into a dangerous situation. By the same token, he wasn't about to stay behind while his men went to check out the would-be assassin, but if they separated would Bilbo again be attacked, and if so would his men be sufficient to protect his halfling since he would have to take men with him as well. And what to do about the elf...

Wanting all the facts, Thorin ordered the rest to give him a moment as he herded Bilbo off to the side where the pack horses still stood with their loads of goods, Thorin keeping his voice down as he asked how well the hobbit knew this Arthur.

"I've known him since I was a mere hobbitling, Thorin. I'd trust him with both our lives." And he would, Bilbo didn't doubt his friend's honor and skill for a moment.

"Would you trust him with Frodo's?" He knew the other hobbit was like a son to Bilbo.

"I would. Without hesitation."

Nodding, he would trust Bilbo's judgement and his own instincts where the elf was concerned, Thorin came to his decision, his eyes boring into Bard's when he turned his attention back to the leader of Dale. "I will leave my consort here with the elf, and some of my men while I retrieve the assassin's body and examine the scene. The elf is kin to the King of Mirkwood. If anything happens to the both of them you will not only have the people of Erebor ready to shed your people's blood, but the elves of Mirkwood as well. Not to mention the fact that my consort is a relative of the Shire's Thain, who you do regular business with. Am I making myself clear?"

Everyone understood. If anything happened to the consort and his protectors, Dale would be hated by all, if not destroyed by its more war inclined neighbors should lives be lost.

Ergo, nothing better happen to the hobbit.

Looking amused as opposed to remotely worried like everyone else, Arthur nodded at the king in recognition of the fact that should he fail to protect Bilbo, the King Under the Mountain would demonstrate his dislike of elves a lot more strongly than normal, if it that threat had gone unspoken.

Bilbo didn't like the idea, but he also wasn't about to argue with Thorin in front of all these people. Family was one thing, but this wasn't something he knew enough about to warrant him questioning his husband's authority in front of other high ranking officials. Keeping Thorin with him would make him feel better, but he had to have faith that all the stories he'd heard about his dwarf's prowess on the battlefield were true.

So Bilbo didn't argue, agreeing to head into the meeting hall Thorin and the others had vacated and wait for his husband there with the guards he'd had earlier, Arthur, and some of Bard's guards as an extra security measure. He did give Thorin's hand a hard squeeze before they separated though, and ordered him to be careful in a voice meant only for his husband's ears.

Thorin promised to do so, and ordered him to do the same.

Allowing Arthur to escort him over to the large chairs situated in front of the meeting hall's fireplace, which was currently unlit, Bilbo was too lost in his own thoughts and worries to care about the fact
that he had to struggle a little to get into one of the seats, where he curled up while Arthur took the one beside him and the guards covered their backs. It was gloomy in the room, the windows providing little light, but it suited his mood so Bilbo wasn’t about to complain about that either.

"You really think he was aiming for me?" He asked in Elvish, not wanting the others to understand.

"Yes."

"To harm Thorin?"

"Possibly." Arthur's face softened a little. "I was worried when I received word of your marriage, I'd heard nothing to suggest the two of you could know each other well enough to enter such a union. But I will rest easier now, seeing how much he cares for you."

Blinking in surprise, and aware that he sounded pathetically hopefully, Bilbo asked if Arthur really thought that.

Raising a dark eyebrow Arthur asked what he was missing in a parental tone that reminded Bilbo of the long history they had together.

Well long for him, Bilbo thought as he squirmed under Arthur's knowing, penetrating stare. Arthur had been an occasional visitor to the Shire since he'd resided in his mother's womb, a friend of hers and then his as the years went by. It was from Arthur that he'd learned to speak the other man’s language, and to him that he'd come to with questions when he'd realized that he had no interest in the lovely female hobbits everyone expected him to want to court. Arthur had mourned with him when he'd lost his parents, and had stayed with him for over a month when he'd come by and learned of Bilbo's broken heart when his first love had deserted him. In all of Middle Earth there was probably no one he felt more comfortable with, when it came to discussing his most private thoughts and feelings.

So he didn't last long under that stare before he was blurting the whole story out, including his reason for marrying Thorin, the fact that their marriage was unconsummated, and the fact that he was finding it twenty times more difficult than he'd expected to figure out the way the minds of dwarves worked. Which was really, really frustrating.

Arthur listened without interrupting, and when Bilbo was done asked what to him was the most logical question. "Is he aware you desire him?"

Bilbo's expression said it all, and had the elf forcing himself not to roll his eyes. How silly and short-sighted the short lived could be at times. His friend was usually more aware than most of his kind, but when it came to affairs of the heart…

"Bilbo, it is widely believed by the other races, the ones that are even aware of your existence, that hobbits don't desire those of the same sex, and your people have reinforced that belief to the best of their abilities. It's entirely possible that he offered you an unconsummated marriage because he thought it was the only way you would accept his proposal. Therefore it stands to reason he has not, nor will he make any sexual interest in you known without some indication on your part that you would welcome his advances. I haven't heard anything in the past few decades, but in his youth he took only other males to his bed, and moments ago he held you as though you were precious to him. I believe you would not be rash to request a true marriage."

"And if he says no we'll both be miserable and awkward around each other. Even more so on the latter."
There was a time and place for subtly, but rarely with dwarves. They were far from the most observant people when it came to romance, Arthur knew, and could be painfully blunt at times. Throw in a hobbit's natural politeness and hesitation to assert himself, and this could end very badly.

Allowing himself a brief sigh Arthur shook his head and then leaned over to gently grasp Bilbo chin so that the hobbit would have no choice but to meet his gaze. "I will help you get your dwarf."

A long pause. "How?"

The grin that broke over Arthur's face was both knowing and alluring enough to have a couple of the other occupants in the room blinking and squirming a little in surprised appreciation.

"Here is what you must do…"

As the elf had assured him, the would be assassin was very dead, the man's arrow having gone through his left eye, killing him immediately. Bard recognized the filthy, thin man as a former ranger who'd been thrown out of the ranks a few years ago. The why had been kept quiet, but Bard knew the man now made his living by selling his 'services' to whoever would pay. He'd been in Dale for three weeks, and had spent most of that time gambling and drinking his money away. There was nothing on the body or in the room the former ranger has died in to indicate who had paid him for this particular job, but when they arrived at the room the bastard had been renting one of Thorin's men discovered a pouch that gave Thorin a very good idea where to begin his search.

The coins were his people's, engraved with their markings and still carrying the faint smell of dragon on their surfaces. If he could have crushed the coins he held Thorin would have, squeezing them so tightly against his flesh in a silent show of his fury while the others continued to toss the room, wisely not commenting on the discovery.

When the room had nothing else to reveal they left, Bard falling into step beside Thorin.

"I'll put out feelers, ask around. I'll find out who he talked to, who he's been seen with since he got here. I'll keep an eye out for rangers as well, see what they can tell me about him."

Nodding, Thorin stated the amount of gold he'd pay for information, then the amount he'd pay for the person or persons responsible.

Eyes wide Bard just nodded, imagining how much easier the information gathering was going to be, being able to offer that sort of incentive. It also went unsaid that his people were likely to remember seeing a dwarf in town looking to speak with the dead man, but even with a description it would still be near to impossible unless every possible dwarf was trotted out to be looked over by any witnesses.

Though the King Under the Mountain was possible angry enough at the moment to do precisely that.

Truth be told he'd felt sorry for the dwarf when he'd heard about the deal the man had been tricked into making with the Shire's Thain. Leading people was hard enough without coming home to a spouse you hadn't wanted to marry in the first place. Marriage was bad enough when you loved the one you'd married, Bard mentally acknowledged with a small smile. But it would seem that Erebor's king had chosen wisely when it came to his hobbit, in that the dwarf was at least bound to someone who mattered to him. And who cared for the dwarf in return judging from the way the hobbit had fretted before they'd left.

As they neared the meeting hall one of the guards watching the doors opened one of them and called in to alert the others to their return. In short order the building's occupants walked out to meet them,
the elf still at the hobbit's side, eyes scanning and watching everything and everyone.

Both Thorin and Bard were willing to admit, at least to themselves, that they were glad the elf was on their side. If not for the pointy eared know-it-all odds were a great deal of blood would have been shed over the hobbit's corpse as it was unlikely any of them would have been able to reach the halfling in time. The former ranger had had a full quiver of arrows, and would have likely drawn another if the first had failed to hit its mark.

It pleased and lessened Thorin's fury a little when his hobbit came straight to him, the relief on Bilbo's face a clear testament to the fact that his consort had been worrying for his safety. Cared enough to worry.

And because he'd worried too, in the back of his mind that something might happen to his hobbit while he was gone despite the guards, Thorin allowed himself a brief brush of his fingers through Bilbo's curls before straightening the hobbit's crown and then dropping his hand to his side as he confirmed that nothing had happened in their absence.

"No, nothing happened. You found the Man?"

"Yes. Bard recognized him as a former ranger who went by the name Seether." For now he'd leave out the fact that they'd found dwarvish gold in the man's room, there was no need to have the hobbit jumping at shadows until they had a better idea where the threat was coming from. He'd make sure the guards he'd assigned to watch over Bilbo knew to be on their guard, and that their lives would be forfeit if anything happened to his consort.

"Rangers often come by the Shire, but I don't know one by that name. I could send a letter, ask Hamish to ask around and see if anyone knows him." The more they knew about this man the better, and people often didn't notice hobbits and therefore didn't know to censor their words.

"We found evidence to suggest that he was paid to harm you. I'll find out who and deal with them."

Reading between the lines, not to mention the fact that he'd had plenty of time to think about who might want him harmed even with Arthur's distracting suggestions on how to get Thorin, Bilbo figured that he was right to guess that his would be assassin had been hired by a dwarf, or a group of dwarves that didn't approve of him because he wasn't one. Thorin had warned him that there were those in the mountain who didn't want him married to Thorin, and he'd seen with his own eyes the way some of them looked at him...but it was a terrifying thing to know that he was wanted dead.

Cupping Bilbo's chin Thorin gently made his consort look at him. "I will let no harm come to you."

Working up a smile Bilbo nodded to reassure him. "I know you will." Pause. "Thorin, can we go home now?"

Warmed that much more to hear his halfling refer to the mountain as home, Thorin swore to himself yet again that he would personally hunt down whoever had tried to take Bilbo from him and gut anyone involved. He didn't care who they were, one of his or not. They'd sealed their fates.
While Thorin and Bard discussed last minute details and the other dwarves rearranged some of the supplies so that all mounts were carrying items, which would mean they could set a harder pace and get home sooner, Arthur left Bilbo with them for a few minutes and then soon returned with his mount and a small satchel, which he gifted to his favorite hobbit. He explained, in Elvish, that while he'd originally intended to browbeat Thorin into letting him stay at Erebor for a few days so that they could catch up and perhaps arrange for him to get a look at the Royal library, he'd decided that wouldn't be for the best given the current situation. Elves were not well received by dwarves, and obviously aligning himself with one would do Bilbo more harm than good at the moment.

"Because one or more of them wants to not just harm me, but kill me." Bilbo stated in Elvish, neither pretending they didn't know what the others weren't saying in a misguided attempt to protect him.

"Exactly. I would prefer to come and protect you myself until I know you'll be safe, but I think it best I leave that to your king. And you can trust the company that followed him to Erebor to face the dragon, their loyalty to him is to the very marrow of their beings. The rest...have a care until you know them well."

"I will. I promise."

"In the satchel are items I mentioned, as well as a few I didn't, but the most important are the sheets of parchment. They'll get you started on learning Khuzdul. Even my understanding is only rudimentary, but what's there I'm sure of. Learn everything you can about them, Bilbo, show them you care about them and their culture. That you won't alter their way of living, but become as much one of them as a hobbit can. It's change they fear, as they prefer things set in stone. Pun entirely intended."

Laughing, how could he not, Bilbo grinned and shook his head. "And they all think Elves don't have a sense of humor."

"More like they lack the intelligence to understand it." Was Arthur's smart response, lips still curved in a knowing smile. "Now I will see you off to the outskirts of Erebor, and then I will leave and see what I can find out on my own. If any information I believe is valuable to you comes to my ears, I will pass it along to you."

"Thank you, my friend."

Understanding each other the two parted ways, Bilbo over to his pony to get back into the saddle, while Arthur mounted his own horse bareback, maneuvering it over to join the rest of the party, before stating for the benefit of the dwarves in the common tongue his intention to accompany them for a bit before returning to Dale.

Since a number of them had thought the elf would insist on coming with them to the Lonely Mountain, this struck them as a happy medium so to speak, not that they'd say so.

So off they went with Bilbo and Thorin in the middle with their guards all around them, Arthur keeping pace on the outside, careful not to get close enough to annoy any of the dwarves as he and Bilbo kept up a lively conversation about Arthur's recent travels, particularly his visit with some Ents, who were always entertaining as well as incredibly frustrating at times.
Even the dwarves had to bite back smiles and chuckles at Arthur's demonstration of one Ent's attempt to tell him a joke about an Orc, a dwarf and a wizard meeting up in a pub.

All in all the ride went well without another attempt on anyone's life or even too many dark, suspicious looks from the dwarves' which Arthur appreciated. Of course a number of them were still smarting from the fact that the elf had protected their consort when that was their job, so they were too busy being extra vigilant to care about showing the pointy-eared intruder the usual distain and dislike they would have normally heaped on Arthur's head.

When they were in the dwarves' undisputed territory Arthur announced that he would head back now, saying goodbye to Bilbo and then turning his attention to Thorin, giving the dwarf king a very piercing look that was as sharp as any blade.

None of the other dwarves was pleased when the elf asked to speak to Thorin privately, but their king nodded and left the protective circle of his men, riding a short distance away to hear what the elf had to say to him.

"I leave my friend in your hands, Thorin Oakenshield, King Under the Mountain. I do not do that lightly. I will not issue threats as to what I will do if he should die before his already short time on this plane ends, I believe we understand each other when it comes to our hobbit. I will say that if it becomes too dangerous for him to remain in the mountain, send him to Mirkwood. There is no protection for him in the Shire, but your people would be fools to trespass on my uncle's lands."

"You think I would trust his life to your uncle, who does nothing if it doesn't benefit him?"

"There would be no debt incurred, Dwarf, and to turn Bilbo away would be a black mark on my uncle's honor that he would not tolerate. Bilbo carries the mark of a truth seeker; that will secure his safety within Thranduil's halls."

Eyes widening slightly, Thorin nodded in understanding automatically. He knew what a truth seeker was, they were people, generally elves, who traveled all over Middle Earth to collect information about the other races and their own, recording the histories and stories they learned in books and scrolls that were passed down through the ages. They were also supposed to be welcomed into any holding they entered, especially since they could control how the ruler of said holding went down in history so to speak.

"I'll ask around and pass on my findings, until then I bid you goodbye, Your Highness. Until our paths cross again."

Thorin nodded his head, watching the elf leave before steering his mount back over to retake his place at Bilbo's side, where he remained until they were once again safe within the walls of Erebor. Which, they both knew, wasn't as safe for Bilbo as it should have been.

Standing in front of their bathroom mirror that night, studying his appearance, Bilbo could only hope his nerves wouldn't be as obvious to Thorin as they were to him, though maybe the other man would think he was just worrying about what had happened that day, instead of the real reason, which was putting his plan into action. Well Arthur's plan technically, which was more cause to worry since he didn't have the elf's confidence that it would work.

Fingers worrying the bottom of his nightshirt, the one that was too big for him now, Bilbo couldn't understand why Arthur had told him to wear the loosest nightshirt he had, but as his friend had
reminded him, repeatedly, the elf had far more experience seducing men then he did.

Lifting his wrist up to his nose Bilbo experimentally sniffed at it again, enjoying the scent he'd rub in there but still skeptical about the reaction Arthur had said Thorin would have to it. The bottle of scent Arthur had given him, it was based on some special fruit he'd never heard of, was supposed to be irresistible to dwarves. He had a hard time believing that given the fact that dwarves tended to avoided fruit unless they were in desserts, but he liked the smell so if nothing else there was that.

He'd put it on his wrists and at his throat, now it was time to see if it worked.

Taking a calming breath for courage, and hoping for some luck, Bilbo nodded decisively at his reflection and then headed over to the door that led to Thorin's rooms, giving it a solid knock before dropping his hand to his side to wait for a reply.

He didn't have to wait long, Thorin all but pulling the door off its hinges in his hurry to get the door open to no doubt assure himself that Bilbo was alright.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you."

"No, it's fine. What's-"

Bilbo watched as the strangest look came over Thorin's face, the other man visibly sniffing the air after a moment's pause, which had Bilbo fighting the urge to squirm. And since he didn't trust himself not to blurt out the question of whether or not Thorin liked what he was smelling, Bilbo blurted out the ruse he was using to explain his presence.

"I was wondering if you wouldn't mind letting me sleep with you tonight. It's silly, I know, but-I've never been in a situation like today and-I'll sleep better with you nearby. If you don't mind."

Struggling not to move in close and sniff all over his consort like a dog, how horrifyingly embarrassing that would be, Thorin made himself ignore the fact that Bilbo smelled utterly delicious all of a sudden and focus on what he'd just been asked. Not that he really needed to think about it, since when didn't he want Bilbo in his bed?

He nodded and motioned for Bilbo to walk into his rooms.

"Thank you."

Once they were both inside and the door was closed behind him, Bilbo asked Thorin if he was still working, motioning towards what Thorin was wearing, since the other man wasn't yet dressed for bed.

"Not working. For once. I was-going through a jewelry box that belonged to my mother. Its contents are Dis's now, but she thought I might like to look through them anyway."

"Would you show me? And tell me about her? Unless it's too painful, sometimes it is." He'd lost his own parents after all, and knew both the pain and comfort things that had once belonged to them could give. Arthur had advised him to learn about everything that was important to Thorin, which he'd already been trying to do anyway, but now might not be the best time given the day's events.

"No, I don't mind."

Pleased Bilbo walked over to take a seat on the floor in front of the fire since there was only the one large chair there and he wasn't brave enough to ask about just sitting in Thorin's lap. "You can just pass them down to me, if you like. I don't mind."
Thorin thought about pointing out that they could just use the bed, but decided that it would probably be for the best if they saved that for later, when he wasn't thinking about how much he wanted to bury his face in Bilbo's neck and breathe him in. He needed to build up some immunity first. And figure out how he was going to make it clear to the hobbit that whatever he'd put on his skin was not to be worn ever again. Was the halfling trying to torture him?

Picking up the decorated box from where he'd left it, Thorin brought it over and took a seat beside Bilbo on the floor, waving off the other man's assurance that he could take the chair. "It's fine. I'll get another chair brought in here for you, for when you visit."

The beaming smile he got in response had Thorin thinking that even without the new scent his consort was more than capable of driving any dwarf mad with desire.

Shuffling just a little closer to Thorin and hoping it wasn't obvious, it had been a very, very long time since he'd pulled this kind of move, Bilbo reached out and opened the box, reaching in to pull out an ornately engraved ring, topped with a large red ruby. Hobbits weren't big on jewelry, they preferred to keep things simple, but he knew enough about dwarves to know that very few things interested them more than what could be mined from the earth. And just as Thorin had gone out of his way to give him a garden and hobbit food, he'd learn about metals and gemstones and appreciate them for no other reason than to please his husband.

One by one Bilbo picked out various pieces of jewelry, Thorin telling him memories associated with some of them, while others he simply used as teaching tools when Bilbo asked about a gem or type of metal he didn't recognize. They were all fit for a queen, literally, and were some of the finest examples of dwarven craftsmanship to be found outside the treasuries.

Catching Thorin in the act of giving him a softly amused look as they worked their way through the box, Bilbo asked what he was thinking about, cocking his head to the side questioningly.

"I was thinking about what my mother would make of you."

"I should have liked to have met her." Though it was a bit weird imagining a mother with a beard that could hold all these beads, Bilbo thought with a smile, fingering his own beads carefully. He could barely manage the ones he had.

"She'd have liked you."

"Really?" Now he really wished that Thorin's mother was still alive, though thinking that made him feel a little ashamed of himself, so that Bilbo sent up a silent apology for wishing her alive solely for his own selfish reasons. Even if she'd like him even less than Dis did, he still would wish for her to be alive for Thorin's sake. He could hear how much the man missed her when he spoke of her.

"Yes. She had a fondness for food and learning about the world around her, like you." Thorin opted not to add that his mother had also loved small, cute things, and would have probably thought of Bilbo as an adorable pet to cuddle and have fun with.

"I bet she was surprised, in the afterlife, when she heard you'd married me."

"I don't doubt it."

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stones and metals meant little to them, and he'd noticed that Bilbo only wore his beads and the bracelet when it came to physical adornments. His gifts were worn, but otherwise Bilbo was more concerned with his clothes than accessories. So the interest the hobbit was showing, just like the beads and bracelet, were for his sake and his alone, and that knowledge warmed him more than the fire before them.

Not to mention how sweet it was to watch his halfling fight to stay awake, the other man's eyes drooping but stubbornly opening again and again. It would seem that the nightmares Bilbo had imagined coming his way weren't enough to keep his consort awake.

Time for bed, Thorin decided after watching Bilbo nearly fall asleep sitting up two times, closing the box and setting it aside as he got to his feet, holding out a hand to Bilbo as he stated that it was obviously late and they should be heading for bed.

"But we didn't finish going through them all." The hobbit's protest was marred by the loud yawn that followed his statement, Bilbo flushing a little as he apologized for the sound.

"We can finish looking at them tomorrow. Come."

Bilbo giving him his hand, Thorin used it to help the hobbit to his feet, letting it go and then placing his hand on the small of Bilbo's back, using it to herd him towards the bed. He waited until Bilbo was climbing up the short case of stairs to get to the bed before he walked over towards his dresser, lifting his shirt up and over his head as he did so. Setting it aside he then reached for his belt buckle, pausing when he felt eyes on his back. Since there was only one other person in the room Thorin knew exactly who was watching, and though he told himself it was probably nothing he couldn't help but be very aware of Bilbo's presence as he finished undoing his belt and went about removing it, then his boots, and socks.

That he hesitated to remove the last article of clothing for a moment mortified him, enough that Thorin called himself a number of unflattering names under his breath as he stripped off his pants and added then to the pile of his other clothes. And like phantom hands Thorin could feel Bilbo's eyes moving over his body, no amount of telling himself that the hobbit was just interested because his body type was so different from a halfling's doing him any good.

It was a damn good thing he had his back to his consort, Thorin knew, given that said body seemed convinced that Bilbo was staring at him because he desired him and was getting harder and more aroused by the second no matter what his mind tried to tell him.

Hastily donning the same sleepwear he'd worn their first night together, Thorin asked Mahal for strength and then turned and walked around the room to extinguish the other lights before moving around the bed to his side, pulling aside the covers and sliding under them.

Turning his head Thorin found Bilbo still watching him, though the light from the still crackling fireplace wasn't bright enough to let him see what was in his hobbit's eyes.

Feeling like he should say something, and just wanting to touch a little more, Thorin lifted out a hand and gave Bilbo's curls a gentle stroke. "Go to sleep, no harm will come to you here."

"I know I'm safe with you." Was Bilbo's sleepy response, punctuated by another yawn.

"Always."

"Good night, Thorin."

"Good night."
Listen To The Consort

Thorin was rapidly coming to the conclusion that his hobbit was going to drive him insane. Whether that was Bilbo's intent or not he hadn't decided, but then again he wasn't exactly in the best of shape mind wise either. Either way Thorin didn't know how much more he could take before he said to hell with his honor and promises, and threw the intoxicating halfling onto his bed and ravish him within an inch of both their lives. Or died, he was willing to die at this point if it meant he got to sample every inch of Bilbo's body first.

It was a little over a week since the attack in Dale, and Bilbo had stopped sleeping in his bed two days ago, thank Mahal, but that torture had only been replaced with new ones that continued to leave him hard and aching for the majority of the day, which was no easy thing to hide. His sheets smelled of his hobbit, as did the vast majority of his clothes since the day before Bilbo had gone on a clothes cleaning spree that had ended with his own clothing being washed as well. So now his room smelled of the hobbit, who thankfully didn't smell of whatever delicious fragrance he'd bought in Dale anymore even though he hadn't been able to come up with a way to talk the hobbit out of wearing it. Thankfully, for the sake of everyone's sanity, Bilbo had noticed the reaction of others to his smell, and had stopped wearing the stuff. Just in the nick of time too, as Thorin's control had been all but completely shredded thanks to having had to restrain himself from killing a number of his subjects for all but licking their lips over HIS consort.

As it was he'd made his intentions clear to those who'd outright licked their lips, the bastards sporting the bruises to prove it afterwards.

On top of that, like that wasn't enough, he also had yet to find any solid evidence pointing him in the direction of the dwarf or dwarves responsible for the attempted assassination of his hobbit. Whoever they were had covered their tracks well, and he'd received word from Bard that he'd had little luck thus far too.

In short, Thorin was having a bad week and that was before the cave in.

As soon as he got word of what had happened Thorin pushed everything else to the side and rushed with his men to the scene of the accident, joining the workers in their frantic work to remove the heavy rocks that had sealed off a passageway, which not only prevented those on the other side from getting out, but seriously decreasing their air supply and chances of survival as well as the minutes ticked by. Forming lines they worked in teams to pass the rocks away from the scene, the process slow and hard going as they eventually came face to face with the huge chunks of rock that needed to be broken up and shifted around before more progress could be made.

Hours ticked by in constant toil as the volunteers traded off positions, though Thorin refused to stop and take a break as he stubbornly remained right where he was. And then, to his surprise, Bilbo was suddenly at his side with a look on his adorable face that made it clear he wasn't to be argued with.

"This dwarf here is going to take your place for fifteen minutes. You're coming with me to get something to eat and drink, Thorin. Now."

Opening his mouth to argue Thorin wisely shut it again, nodding his head before turning his attention to the dwarf lagging bashfully behind Bilbo, obviously very worried that he was about to be embroiled in a royal argument. Giving the dwarf his place in the line Thorin made it clear he'd be back shortly and then allowed himself to be directed out of the immediate area, though once they
were as close to alone as they could get he gave Bilbo a dark, censoring look to go with his growly tone of voice.

"It's not safe for you to be down here."

"I've been down here for two hours making sure our people get fed and taken care of. Which you'd already know if you'd paused for a minute or two sometime in the past four hours."

Jaw dropping a little in surprise Thorin could see, as they left the rescue workers behind, that a lot had been going on while he'd been focused on clearing the rubble to get to his trapped people. What had once been a fairly large, empty hallway connected to the space they'd been working in was now filled with people either helping the workers or visiting a variety of stations that had been set up in various spaces. One appeared to be dedicated to serving food, the other drink, while off to the side it appeared that a makeshift healer's area had been set up, with bedding already set up for the workers they hoped to rescue and healers currently hard at work tending the minor injuries suffered by those who been working earlier to clear the blocked off passageway.

"You can wash up over there." Bilbo informed him, pointing to a forth area he hadn't noticed, which consisted of a large trough and a table stacked high with cloths meant for drying off. "I'll go and get a bandage for that cut on your wrist, the boys are supposed to be getting your food."

Not about to argue with the hobbit given how hungry and thirsty he suddenly realized he was, Thorin walked over to the washing station and did the best that he could there before he strided over to the seat his nephews were guarding, Fili holding a bowl and spoon for him, while Kili had a chunk of bread and a goblet that was hopefully filled with something cold in his other hand.

Taking the seat Thorin accepted the bowl of what turned out to be a warm, hearty stew, dipping the bread into it so that he could enjoy both at the same time as he thanked the boys for getting it for him.

"It's no problem, Uncle Bilbo did most of the work." Fili informed him with a shrug.

"You should have seen him, Uncle, it was unbelievable!" Kili added, gesturing wildly with his hands as he told Thorin all about how Bilbo had insisted on coming here as soon as he'd heard what had happened and how he and Fili had come with the hobbit since they'd known that that was what their uncle would want them to do since they'd promised to stick by their new uncle all day. They'd stuck their heads in, along with Bilbo, to make sure he was well and then Bilbo had turned around and started issuing orders when he realized no one else was, sending the dwarves who'd gathered in the hallway hoping for word or to help on various errands to arrange for food, water and to gather everything the healers might need so that it was on hand for the workers when they were freed.

With great delight Fili added that a few of the dwarves had been hesitate to follow Bilbo's orders, him being a hobbit and all, but Bilbo had put his hands on his hips and told them that if they were the sort of dwarves who would let their own kind die rather than listen to a hobbit then they should leave Erebor and go join the other dark races, since they obviously lacked heart or anything resembling honor.

"It was epic." The two brothers stated together gleefully.

Eyes flashing, Thorin demanded to know who these dwarves were at once. They might be the ones he'd been hunting since Dale.

"I wrote their names down for you." Looking smug Fili handed it over, his smile only growing when Thorin told him he'd done well. "Do you wish us to remain here with Uncle Bilbo, or can we help you clear away the rocks?" For themselves he and his brother were a little torn as to where they
wanted to be, since helping with the work was more honorable, but watching the hobbit was currently more fun.

"Stay with him, don't let him out of your sight."

"He's out of our-oh, there you are." Kili raised a hand in greeting as Bilbo rejoined them.

"Hold this." Bilbo gave his younger nephew the bandage roll and then squatting down turned his attention to Thorin's gashed wrist, which was thankfully on the outside so that Thorin could continue to hold the bowl and eat while he tended to the wound. "Keep eating." He added, to make sure Thorin did precisely that.

"It's just a scratch." Thorin pointed out, though he continued to eat since he was hungry and keeping Bilbo where he could see him suited him just fine at the moment. And since the hobbit's curly hair was right there Thorin placed his spoon back in his bowl and leaned over to lightly ruffle the other man's hair in a far too short show of affection. "The boys have told me what you've been up to. Thank you."

The smile Bilbo gave him warmed him from the inside out. "Well as I keep telling you, I am your consort and that means that the people who live here are mine too. But you're welcome."

Smiling Thorin went back to eating and being, in his eyes, babied, though as soon as he was done eating he was out of the chair and ready to get back to work, ordering Bilbo to be careful and not to do anything too strenuous.

He chose to ignore the snort and arms crossing stubbornly he got in response to that command.

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Hours later, when the survivors and the dead had all been recovered and seen to, and he'd had a chance to speak with the families involved, Thorin slowly headed up the stairwell that would lead to his personal quarters, every step an effort. It wasn't his body that was exhausted, though aches and pains were making themselves known throughout his musculature, but the knowledge of the losses suffered and the pain being experienced by those left behind weighed heavy on his shoulders. He knew, after all, what it was to lose someone who was a vital part of your life, the agony when the bonds of both blood and family were severed by death. He'd seen the knowledge of that pain in far too many eyes today, and not just in the eyes of those who'd lost someone recently.

The people of Erebor, his people, knew far too much about losing loved ones to sudden, unexpected death.

And this was so senseless too, the passageway one that had had no great importance in the overall structure of the mountain and the rooms around it. It had simply been one of many passageways that had been more damaged than some of the others, and therefore had been scheduled ahead of them in order to halt the fractures and shore them up before they became a major hazard that might cause problems in the future. Six dwarves had lost their lives because the stability of the ceiling had been misjudged or something had happened to set off the chain of events had brought chunks of the ceiling and the supports around them down.

Just thinking about it made Thorin want to do some destroying of his own, the sheer wastefulness of it all infuriating him to his very bones. The fact that there wasn't really anything he could have done to prevent it from happening hardly registered, his other emotions far too volatile for him to think in a remotely logical manner.
When he reached his room Thorin wasn't surprised to find Bilbo waiting for him, the hobbit had made it clear that he'd be waiting and would come down and get him if Thorin didn't return to his quarters within the agreed upon time.

"Alright, it's into the bath with you. I have the water ready."

Right now all he wanted to do was try and no doubt fail to sleep, but Thorin knew he was filthy at the moment and a quick soak probably would do his body some good. He couldn't appear weak tomorrow, especially as his people would be looking to him for strength in the face of this latest tragedy.

So he nodded and headed for the door that lead to their shared bathroom, not even blinking at the fact that the water was a lilac purple for some reason. Without a thought to his audience Thorin removed the now filthy bandage from around his wrist, stripped down to his bare skin, and climbed into the tub, groaning in relief as his aching muscles registered the relaxing heat of the water as it lapped over his flesh and up to his neck before settling into place.

And then Bilbo was straddling the lip of the tub with his already short breeches rolled up even more to reveal even more smooth, freckled skin, which made him hard for Thorin to ignore as the hobbit leaned in close. "I'm going to take your beads out; your hair is as bad as the rest of you. I'll help you put them back in afterwards."

He didn't like that idea, especially when it came to his marriage beads, but Thorin nodded and allowed Bilbo's nimble fingers to carefully remove the beads, Bilbo cradling them carefully in his hand and getting up from his seated position once he was finished to place them in a bowl they kept near the sinks for just such a purpose before coming back to undo the braiding.

Hoping that Bilbo would attribute his closed eyes to exhaustion and not a desperate attempt to hide his pleasure as the hobbit's fingers combed through his hair to make sure the braids were completely out, Thorin was downright grateful when Bilbo told him to dunk his head under the water so that it would be nice and wet. Hiding underwater sounded like a damn fine idea to him.

So he stayed under as long as he could, sending up multiple prayers to his maker the whole time before regretfully surfacing, pushing his hair out of his eyes and wiping away the water before opening them to find Bilbo gaping at him like a landed fish.

Lips twitching, he couldn't help it, Thorin had to ask the halfling if he was alright three times before Bilbo finally nodded his curly head.

"I'm- ah-you can stay underwater a really long time."

Having the oddest feeling that that wasn't why Bilbo had given him such odd looks, Thorin wanted to question him but didn't, simply stating that he wasn't a fan of water but did all right in it as he flicked the water he was currently sitting it for emphasis, which drew his attention to the fact that it was now a dark violet color.

"What happened to the water while I was under?"

"Ah, that. I've never seen it go quite so dark before, but the mix of herbs and such I put in are supposed to draw out dirt and such...."

Taking pity on the poor, blushing hobbit, he could only take so much before he'd pull the halfling into the tub with him, Thorin changed the subject, informing Bilbo for both their sakes that he could take over from here. Thanks to the odd color of the water, which he was now extremely grateful for,
Thorin could hide the fact that he was currently hard and leaking for the hobbit, but he could only hide his desire for so long, especially if Bilbo insisted on remaining so close to him while he was naked.

Thorin could see Bilbo considering his words, which gave him hope that he really was going to be spared further torment, but then that curly head was shaking, dashing his hopes to pieces.

"Oh no, you're sore and tired and if you fell asleep in this thing you'd drown for sure. Now just close your eyes again and relax while I take care of your hair for you."

"I already washed it."

"You-nevermind. No, Thorin Oakenshield, your hair is far from washed, believe me." And that apparently being that Thorin watched his hobbit pick up a container that he recognized as being one of bottles Bilbo routinely left in the bathroom. Whatever the concoction was, it was a cream colored mixture of some sort, it was soon on both of Bilbo's hands and then the hobbit was leaning over again to rub the stuff into his hair.

Eyes widening as he stared blindly at the hobbit's shirt covered chest while Bilbo's fingers massaged the gunk into his hair, nails scrapping against his scalp gently, Thorin allowed his eyes to close again as he instinctively moved to get more of the touches, not even noticing the small sounds of pleasure he was making deep in his throat. It had been so very long since someone had knowingly touched him so intimately without it being about sex or because he'd grossly injured himself and was beyond patching himself up. Bilbo was doing this solely for his benefit, taking care of him and-Thorin completely lost the ability to think when Bilbo shifted his attention to working the lather into his beard.

Oh Mahal.

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Doing his best to ignore the growly slash purring noises Thorin was making, which was about as easy as ignoring a dragon were he to suddenly fly down to sit beside you, Bilbo was thankful that Thorin's eyes were closed so that the dwarf couldn't see the way he was biting down hard on his bottom lip to keep himself from making some noises of his own. He'd been able to ignore the sight of Thorin stripping down earlier because frankly the dwarf had been so filthy the idea of being intimate with him hadn't even registered in his mind, but when Thorin had resurfaced after staying underwater for so long, said water streaming down Thorin's beautiful body for that moment when the water had separated as he'd breeched the surface, arm muscles flexing as he'd pushed back all his beautiful hair and then had looked at him with those stunning blue eyes-

Squirming hard, knowing getting comfortable was impossible as he forced himself to keep going, Bilbo sent up what felt like his hundredth prayer since he'd started the whole hair washing thing.

The irony that he'd brought this torture on himself didn't escape him either.
A Hobbit's Husband

By the time all the liquids Bilbo insisted on putting on Thorin's hair had been washed away both hobbit and dwarf couldn't bear to look at the other. Cheeks flushed, eyes glassy, and very much aware of the erection they didn't have a chance in hell of ignoring, Thorin actually had to clear his throat when he stated that he was more than capable of finishing up on his own. As it was the water around him was such a dark purple it was almost black, which suggested it really was time for him to get out because that could not be a good thing to his way of thinking.

Both thinking that the sooner they got away from each other the sooner they could take care of their very pressing needs themselves, Thorin was relieved when Bilbo nodded his head and then turned around so that his back was to Thorin as the hobbit murmured for him to lift his leg so that he could see for himself that the stuff in the water had done its job. He could have just asked Thorin to lift his arm, but Bilbo didn't want to risk looking him in the eyes and chance the man seeing things he did not want the dwarf to see.

And then Thorin was doing as he asked, and Bilbo forgot everything as his eyes went huge with horror.

"YOUR FEET!"

"Bilbo?"

Not even really hearing his husband's words Bilbo scooted across the slick tub's rim and then grabbed Thorin's ankle with both hands so that it couldn't drop back under the water.

"YOUR FEET! HOW COULD YOU LET THEM GET LIKE THIS?!"

Wincing at the halfing's tone of voice, not to mention completely oblivious to what he could be talking about, Thorin kept his voice very reasonable as he asked Bilbo what he was talking about.

It took Bilbo a minute to answer, mostly because he was trying to lower his voice a little since it had belatedly occurred to him that he'd sort of screamed at Thorin. "These are not the feet of a hobbit's husband. You having feet like this…it would be like me walking around in poor quality, man made jewelry in your eyes. Husbands of hobbits do not have feet like this!"

"Ah." Thorin got the analogy, strange as it was, and did his best to hide his amusement. "Unlike you hobbits we don't show our feet in public, nor grow the same amount of hair on them."

"It's not the lack of hair, you have ingrown toe nails and they're uneven and too thick and-and-I have to fix them or I can't call myself a proper hobbit!" Spurred into action Bilbo let go of Thorin's ankle so that it fell back into the water with a splash, got off his seat, and once on his own feet again whirled around to point a commanding finger in his dwarf's direction. "Dry off and get dressed and I'll meet you in front of the fireplace. You can dry your hair while I fix your feet!"

And not waiting for agreement Bilbo was out of the room in a snap to get whatever things he needed for the attention Thorin's feet were about to get.

Shaking his head over the whole thing, hobbits were strange creatures at time, Thorin nonetheless shifted over to start draining out the tub before stepped out of it, his intent to reach for a towel leaving his mind completely as he got a look at himself in the mirror.

"By all the Creators!"
He was clean. So very, very clean. He had never, ever been this clean. Not even when he'd been born, because from what he knew of that process babies did not come out very clean from their mothers. So maybe after his first bath he'd temporarily been this clean but-

Staring down at his hands, seeing for himself that they lacked even specks of dirt, Thorin forcefully dropped his hands down to his sides and deliberately didn't even look at the mirror as he headed back into his room and pulled on some simple trousers, not bothering with a shirt since he was still feeling a little light headed about things. And then he made the mistake of running a hand through his hair, discovering in the process that his hair now had a whole new texture to it that completely threw him off even more.

Sitting down hard in his seat Thorin hardly even noticed when Bilbo entered the room and came over to join him, placing his special chair at a distance from Thorin before taking a seat and telling the dwarf to give him his first foot.

Thorin obediently, which was in both their best interests.

) Staring at what he had to work with Bilbo had to bite down on his bottom lip to stifle a whimper that had nothing to do with Thorin's physical beauty at the moment and everything to do with the monumental task he was currently facing. Not to mention there was a sly voice inside his head that was pointing out that it was entirely possible that all dwarves had such horrible feet. He wasn't entirely sure he was ever going to be able to look another dwarf besides Thorin in the eye ever again. And then there was Fili, Kili and Dis, who were now kin to him and therefore his to look after. What if their feet were as bad as Thorin's? They were blood kin after all and-and the horror of it all was just too much for him to take.

And all that on top of the fact that what he had to do was bound to hurt Thorin.

Apologizing for that ahead of time Bilbo was not at all reassured by the dwarf's statement that he was used to it. But he turned to his task with deep focus, minutes flying by as he used a variety of tools to try and undo over a hundred year's worth of damage.

Close to an hour had passed before either of them said anything beyond small sounds of distress from Bilbo and the occasional grunt of pain from Thorin.

"You hobbits really care so much about feet?"

Bilbo glanced up and gave Thorin a look that said that was an incredibly stupid question.

"No offense meant, Halfling. Your race is simply not known for being as vain as the elves."

Bilbo thought about pointing out that he was pretty sure the elves were generally born gorgeous and would be so regardless of their surroundings and beauty routines, but instead simply stated that it wasn't vanity to presented oneself in a neat and well groomed fashion.

"Yet your people rarely wear ornamentation of any kind."

"Then it's the jewelry that people admire, not the person himself. And while what you make is beautiful, such things have little use in my world. My former world." Bilbo corrected, giving Thorin a brief look of apology before continuing. "Like I do now, we generally only wear such things regularly for sentimental reasons."

"You wear what you wear for me."
"Just as you wear the chain with my mother's ring on it for me." It gave him pleasure every time he saw it.

The two shared a smile as the mood in the room seriously improved, which had Thorin continuing with his questioning, genuinely interested. "So feet are what hobbits look at when choosing a perspective spouse?" Thorin's tone was both amused and slightly teasing, a rare thing for him.

"Well it's something we notice of course, but just as part of the whole. How one looks isn't nearly as important as one's character. I would imagine we seem fairly plain compared to the other races, but then what we value most seems to vary from race to race as well. I'd imagine I broke any number of hearts, when I took you off the market so to speak."

"There were those who wished access to the benefits of being my consort, yes."

"And the fact that you're so handsome had nothing to do with your appeal." Bilbo's amusement was clear in his wry tone and head shaking.

Surprise was written all over Thorin's face and saturated his voice. "You believe me to be handsome?"

Color flooding Bilbo's face as he realized what he'd just said and insinuated, the hobbit did his best to hide his reaction by pretending great interest in Thorin's right foot. "I would imagine you hear quite regularly that the Durin line was well blessed in that area. You and the boys are the handsomest dwarves I've met thus far." Which was entirely true, though he thought Thorin the handsomest by far.

The very loud silence that greeted that statement, combined with the heat of Thorin's stare forced Bilbo to finally look up, the hobbit having no idea how to interpret the dwarf's stare.

"By dwarvish standards I pale in comparison to Nori and his brothers."

Bilbo jaw dropped. "Nori? But he-his hair, it's-" Bilbo moved his hands in pointy ways that were meant to demonstrate the unusual hairstyle of his husband's kinsman. "That's what you dwarves consider attractive? Dear me, and I thought the fact that your women have beards was peculiar!"

And realizing that he'd just insulted Thorin's people Bilbo stuttered out an apology, red for an entirely different reason now.

"I did not take offense, so cease your apologies. I know our races have more differences than similarities, especially when it comes to our idea of beauty."

"Well I wouldn't go that far. And I think that-oh dear. If that's what you consider handsome I-I must seem…" Trailing off Bilbo's face lost all its color, horrified to realize the extent of his unattractiveness by dwarvish standards. He'd known the lack of a beard was a large strike against him, but if Nori and his brothers were what dwarves were looking for romantically than it was no wonder Thorin hadn't shown even the slightest interest in getting him naked. He must seem hideous in comparison with his short curls and no beard or real braiding and-

With the thoughts Bilbo was having all but written on the hobbit's face Thorin's eyes softened, and gently sliding his foot off his consort's lap Thorin got out of his chair and took the two steps necessary to stand in front of the hobbit before crouching down so that they were closer it height.

Flowery words were beyond him, but the dwarf did his best as he reached out to ruffle Bilbo's curls since he loved them so much. "Like you, my idea of male beauty is different than the average dwarf. I would not change you."
"Nor I you." Bilbo's honest nature kicked in. "Except for your feet."

A pause, and then Thorin's deep, rumbly laughter echoed in the room, with Bilbo's smile lighting it up.

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The next day Bilbo headed to his garden in a very good mood, complete with a bounce to his step and a song in his heart that he hummed merrily to himself. Breakfast had been beyond entertaining, the reactions of his sister in law and nephews to Thorin so very humorous that Bilbo couldn't help but chuckle to himself every time he pictured their faces. Of course when he stopped and thought about the fact that their reaction would indicate they'd never seen Thorin clean from top to bottom he had to frown a little, but soon the memory of how Dis had thrown her bowl of oatmeal into the air in shock brought said smile back.

Normally he didn't approve of wasting food, but dwarvish oatmeal left a lot to be desired.

Thorin had spent the whole meal glaring at them, not at all appreciating their constant staring at him, but Bilbo took it as a compliment that he'd made his husband look the very best that he could be. Well maybe not his absolutely best, Thorin wore far too much black and the dwarf's feet weren't quite up to his hobbit standards yet, but he had years to get that all sorted out.

But most importantly he and Thorin had made real progress last night, he was sure of it. And he really did believe that Thorin had been serious when he'd said that he liked him just as he was. True the dwarf probably hadn't meant it in the romantic sense, but Thorin was very blunt and wouldn't have said what he'd said just to be kind. Not to mention he was fairly certain that if Thorin had just been trying to be kind the man would have made a muck of it because Thorin was Thorin.

Arriving at their destination, and wasn't it so wonderful to see the small shoots that herald the coming of grass to smell and touch and lay down in, Bilbo smiled that much wider. Of course he was also looking forward to his vegetables and such growing as well, but he missed grass most of all.

Bilbo forgot about all that though when his little dust bunny friends, five of them, came scurrying over to him despite the fact that his guard was practically at his back still. Usually they waited for the guard to do a quick look around and return to watch the door before they approached him. And they seemed very stirred up about something, enough that Bilbo got down on one knee to stroke them in an attempt to calm them down with no success.

Still obviously very upset the dust bunnies slipped out from under his stroking hands and headed down one of the created paths towards one of the broken sections of the mountain which had been reinforced with boards to make sure that Bilbo didn't fall down the mountain when he went over there to peek through the window that had been put in for his enjoyment.

Following after them Bilbo watched them nimbly climb and bounce up to the window and then they started to bounce up and down furiously on the window's 'sill', the hobbit's fear that they would fall out making him call out for them to stop, his fear rising twenty times higher when he saw that the boards were actually shaking in reaction to what the creatures were doing.

Sweeping them all up and into arms Bilbo quickly backed away from the spot and then started scolding them like they were children, alternating between telling them off for behaving so dangerously and then fussing over them, so very grateful none of them had fallen through the window and ended up dead. Skilled though they were Bilbo wasn't about to believe they could survive falling down the Lonely Mountain.
He was so focused on his dust bunnies that Bilbo didn't even realize his guard had followed him and was messing with the boards until the dwarf started swearing in Khuzdul. Of course he didn't know what his guard was saying, but the tone made it clear the dwarf was very mad about something.

And then he watched as the guard gave one of the board's a hard shove, and with a crack it and a bunch of other boards broke off and tumbled down the mountain's rocky surface.

"Now how-I lean my weight against those boards all the time when I'm looking out the…"
Understanding finally dawning Bilbo walked over to the guard's side in a daze, staring at the spaces between the boards that were still in place, watched as the dwarf's fingers found the proof that made it quite clear that the barrier had been sabotaged, someone hoping that the hobbit would, as per usual, spend some time leaning against the boards, and with his weight pushing them outward would end up tumbling down the mountain with them when the boards gave away.

Feeling more than a little sick at the thought, Bilbo sat down hard on the ground, the dust bunnies all racing into his lap to coo and rub their bodies against his trousers.

"You saved me." Reaching down Bilbo gave them all more petting, gratitude shining in his eyes. "You knew someone had come in here to wreck the barricade, you were jumping to make me see what they'd done. Oh my good little pets, thank you ever so much."

"They served you well today." His guard admitted, his accent so heavy Bilbo only just barely understood him.

Agreeing with that statement completely Bilbo told them that they were all going to get lots of cheese buns for this, words they recognized and made the dust bunnies hop up and down with glee.

"We must leave and alert the king to this latest attempt on your life."

"Oh dear…he's not going to take the news well at all."

"No." The dwarf agreed with a solemn nod of his head. "He will not."

Thorin was quite ready to start killing his subjects. And if one more dwarf walked into a wall or crashed into someone because he or she was too busy staring at him to watch where they were going…he was going to make the damage done by Smaug seem negligible in comparison to the fury he'd unleash on everyone in the vicinity. You'd have thought he'd turned into a female overnight, the way they were gaping and staring and doing absolutely nothing to hide the fact that they were gossiping about him as they whispered and pointed. The fact that whatever Bilbo had done to his feet had them feeling noticeably better, especially when he was constantly kicking walls and rocks to vent his frustration, was of some small consolation, but not nearly enough to make up for the fact that he was going to-

Catching sight of his hobbit Thorin felt his need to go on a rampage abate slightly, informing the council members currently with him that he'd join them shortly as he headed over towards his consort to find out why he wasn't in his gardens, which was where the halfling typical was at this time of day.

The fact that Bilbo was obviously faking a smile was his first clue that something was very wrong, the hobbit's stilted strides another clue that had Thorin picking up speed so that he was standing in front of his consort in record time, demanding to know what was wrong.

"Well, you see…I have good news and I have bad news. Which would you prefer first?"
Meeting One's Match

As previously predicted Thorin did not take the news well at all. The fact that no one had been injured as a result of the sabotage meant little to him given the fact that had Bilbo fallen victim to this latest assassination attempt he'd be very dead at the moment. Bilbo attempts to calm his husband down failed horribly as well, especially since Thorin had quickly reverted to speaking in his mother tongue in his fury which meant the hobbit had absolutely no idea what the dwarf was saying. Not that he couldn't guess from Thorin's tone of voice and hand gestures, which sort of made him glad he didn't know the exact words least he have to scold Thorin in public for bad language. So instead of trying to soothe the dwarf's temper Bilbo just let the man rant and question the guard that had been assigned to him that day and instead went over to stand beside Balin, apologizing if they'd interrupted them on the way to an important meeting.

"No worries, Your Majesty, this is actually for the best. Not the threat on your life of course, but he was wound up quite a bit before this. Once he works off his temper he'll be of more use to everyone."

"Why was he upset before? Did one of the dwarves from yesterday succumb to his injuries today?" Bilbo knew that two of the dwarves brought out alive had been in very bad shape, though the healers had sounded fairly confident that they'd pull through.

"It's all the staring, actually." Balin's lips twitched before settling into only slightly amused lines. "Few have the nerve to ask him about his appearance and the suspense has them acting in ways Thorin is finding most annoying."

Forehead scrunching up Bilbo didn't know what to make of that. He'd assumed that the funny reactions at breakfast had been due to the fact that technically speaking Thorin should still look a bit of a mess due to the filthy work of dealing with all that dirt and rubble the day before. Not to mention it was basically impossible to stay clean for long in Erebor due to the fact that it was still a mess from its decades of unoccupancy save for Smaug, the fact that it was under construction everywhere, and the plain fact that mining the mountain for its treasures meant there was always plenty of dust and dirt to be tracked around and transferred onto things and people.

Not to mention the fact that Thorin was not the sort to care about his appearance in the slightest except when it came to his beads. But Thorin had looked quite elegant on their wedding day, so it wasn't like his people shouldn't realize that he cleaned up very nicely indeed.

"Mostly it's the hair." Balin informed him, since he could see that his words had perplexed the hobbit.

"Ah." Thorin's hair did look perfect if Bilbo did say so himself. The dwarf had actually fallen asleep on him when he'd taken over brushing the thick, unfortunately matted in some places strands into some semblance of order. And with Thorin out like a light...well he had trimmed the split ends and layered things a little, and added some braiding in since he now knew that was something dwarves especially liked in their hair. He'd figured that if Thorin didn't like them he could easily take them out, which the dwarf hadn't. He'd seemed pleased by them actually. But Thorin had clued him in again as to how very different their races were when it came to physical beauty last night, so just in case the dwarf had only kept them in for him Bilbo asked if he'd done something wrong with the braids.
Surprise crossed Balin's face before the dwarf shook his head. "Not at all. You did a splendid job. They just aren't used to him looking like-it's been a very long time since he looked like the king he was born to be."

That Bilbo understood, knowing that Thorin had spent decades working for Men. By blood Thorin had been born a king, but a king without a place to rule or the riches that came with that...well his husband had done what he had to do to insure his survival and that of his people.

"I take it you're responsible for his hands as well, Lad?"

"Ah, yes. I-that was me." He'd meant to go to bed after finishing Thorin's hair but the dwarf's hands had needed attention too and he'd rather been in the zone at the time. With some special tea from his stores to give him a burst of energy he'd dealt with Thorin's fingernails as well before draping Thorin's still fast asleep form with a blanket and turning in for the night.

"How did you get his hands so soft?" All the visible skin on Balin's face went red when Bilbo stared at him in shocked surprise. "I didn't mean-I just happened to notice when he was handing me some papers. Just curious, Lad."

"Oh. I see. Well it's this mix we have, to put in the tub when we bath. It not only cleans the skin but leaves it very smooth. I'd be happy to give you some if you'd like."

"Give him what?"

Both Bilbo and Balin turned to look at Thorin while the former explained that Balin had been asking about the bath stuff he'd used last night.

"Good. Then they'll stare at him instead of me." Scowling, Thorin obviously couldn't wait for that to happen.

"I'm sorry I'm making everyone stare at you."

Thorin's response was to immediately shake his head, his expression softening for a moment. "There's no need to apologize, I like what you did. But enough of that, we have more important things to deal with and discuss at the moment. You'll stay with me for the rest of the day while your guard and men I've assigned look into what was done to the barricade. You'll find the meetings even worse than I do as you don't speak our language, but I'm trusting no one else with your safety today."

"Lead the way."

) For the first meeting Bilbo tried to pay attention, but the majority of the older dwarves spoke nothing but Khuzdul, which he was only beginning to learn thanks to the notes Arthur had given him. And since he couldn't very well ask for someone to translate for him after every sentence, they wouldn't get anything done that way, Bilbo stopped trying to understand what was being said and started composing letters in his head to his various relatives and friends back in the Shire. Some of them he had to write to because it was only proper that he do so, so those letters were short and easy to compose, but others took longer and were a lot more fun to mentally prepare. It got him through the first meeting, anyway. For the second he asked for ink, quill and paper beforehand, and started writing out his letters which worked very well until the third meeting when the dwarves were arguing too loudly and vehemently for him to ignore. Not to mention one of the dwarves kept banging his fists down on the table they were sitting at, which at one point caused him to splatter ink
all over the page he'd been writing on.

Bilbo couldn't stop himself from glaring in that dwarf's direction, but the rude lout didn't even notice since he was too busy shouting and pointing in Thorin's direction. This of course made Bilbo that much madder, since the only one who had the right to rip into his husband this thoroughly was him. Not that he would of course, but in theory that was his right as Thorin's husband.

Thorin was obviously just as displeased, the angry words going back and forth in increasingly raised tones until the dwarf he didn't know was basically screaming at Thorin.

And that was not allowed.

Standing up Bilbo slammed his fisted hands down on the table, not even feeling the sting pain his action caused him. "You will show your king respect or you can leave until you learn some manners!"

"And who are you, to think you can order me, Halfling?"

Aware of Thorin tensing up and preparing to come to his defense Bilbo raised a quelling hand without breaking eye contact with his opponent. "I am your Consort. And while I may not have earned your loyalty or respect yet, you'd do well to remember how much you and everyone else in this room owes my husband. You would not be inside this mountain if not for him and his company, of which you were not a part of. And while I might just be a halfling I do assure you that there are dwarves here who respect my title enough to throw you out of Erebor if I tell them to."

He could bribe Fili and Kili into it, anyway.

But all eyes were on Thorin now, which belatedly clued Bilbo into the fact that maybe, quite probably, he shouldn't have said anything at all and just let Thorin handle things. For all he knew he'd just insulted someone very important, though obviously not as high ranking as he technically was. But still…

"My consort has told you to leave this room, Flói. I suggest you do so before I help you with that task."

The dwarf looked like he intended to argue, but wisely shut his mouth and left without a backward glance, though he slammed the door behind him.

Thorin waited a moment after the dwarf's loud exit before inquiring as to whether or not anyone else wanted to leave, since there would be no shouting in front of the consort on penalty of him being the one to personally escort the dwarf in question out of the room.

No one saying a word, though some eventually nodded their heads in agreement, the rest of the meeting went by a lot more smoothly, to the point that when it was over and everyone else had filed out of the room Balin stated that they should have Bilbo sit in on every meeting. It made these things much easier on his old ears.

Reaching out Bilbo tugged gently on Thorin's shirt sleeve. "You aren't angry are you? I wanted to ask before, but I thought…that might make things worse. And the damage was already done so I-I thought it best not to say anything at all."

"No." Thorin's hand was a rough caress through his curls, something Bilbo had noticed the dwarf tended to do often these days, not that he minded in the least. "Balin was correct, this was a much better meeting than expected, largely because of your presence. Even before you put your foot down they were behaving better because they didn't want to look bad in front of you."
Wincing at the idea that that might be true, it was a wonder poor Thorin and Balin's eardrums hadn't ruptured at this point, Bilbo shook his head and turned the subject back to what he thought was most important. "He shouldn't have spoken to you like that. You shouldn't let him back into the meetings until he learns to behave himself."

"He was an advisor when my grandfather ruled here. He believes I should rule as he did."

"Then he's a fool. You should rule the way you believe Erebor should be ruled because this is not the kingdom it was and never will be again. It will be better...because you'll be in charge to make it so."

Thorin nodded his head and then surprised Bilbo by holding out his hand to him. "Come. I think it's about the time you like to take your tea, and I could use both the break and your company."

Doing his best to disguise his delight Bilbo slid his hand into Thorin's and agreed that yes, it was the perfect time to take tea.

The two invited Balin to join them for tea, it would have been very rude not to since he was right there with them and a friend besides, and on the way up they ran into Fili and Kili who naturally wanted to have a snack too. So it was five of them that took a seat around the royal family's table with tea, scones and the usual accompaniments. The topic under discussion was of course this latest attempt on Bilbo's life as the boys had only just heard of it and wanted to know every detail, all the while promising their new uncle that if they found the person responsible they'd beat him soundly.

Bilbo thanked them of course, all the while rather hoping that they didn't run into the person responsible, who might hurt them instead. He was growing rather fond of the scamps.

"But what I don't get is why Uncle Bilbo is the target." Kili announced after finishing his second scone. "I mean where's the sport in killing a hobbit?"

"Well he's not just any hobbit, now is he? He's our hobbit." Fili immediately corrected his brother.

"But not in line for the throne even if something were to happen to Thorin." Balin added, picking up where Fili had left off as he mused aloud. "We made it very clear from the start to those who had concerns about such things. He cannot give Thorin children so that was never a problem or in question, and we made the contents of the marriage contract available to anyone who might wish to see it. So why him?"

"Someone who wants to take my place perhaps? That's what makes the most sense to me."

"He's so old though."

Thorin's look had Fili whacking his brother upside the head for his uncle.

"Bilbo has a point, it could be someone who hopes to place someone under their control in his place. Or this could even be a diversion, a way to keep us busy while some other dark purpose is put into action." Shaking his head Balin hated the fact that it was likely a group of dwarves who were behind this. It turned his stomach.

"You mean, like they could be intending to harm Thorin?" Bilbo noticeably paled at the idea, the hobbit completely unaware of the fact that he'd wrapped his fingers around Thorin's wrist in reaction. "Making it look like I'm the target, so that when they do strike on purpose people will just think he was killed by mistake? It's just like Lobelia only ten times worse!"
"Who is Lobelia?" Thorin wanted to know, wondering is this person could be in any way responsible for what was happening. And even if she wasn't, any enemy of Bilbo's was an enemy of his.

"She's married to one of my first cousins, dreadful woman. There's nothing she'd like better than to own Bag End." Scowling at the mere thought of her and the quarrels they'd engaged in, Bilbo could only hope that his home was still in one piece when Frodo returned to the Shire.

"Has she tried to murder you?" Fili wanted to know, not getting the connection.

"No, but one time she slipped a goat into mine and two of my neighbors' gardens late at night once everyone else was sleep in the Shire. She wanted to destroy my prize winning tomatoes, you see. She could never beat me and the annual competition was in a week. She had the beast walk all over my plants and my neighbors, because she knew if she just targeted my garden it would be obvious what she was up to. What Otho sees in her is beyond me."

The dwarves didn't know what to say to that, so instead they all shoved food into their mouths and nodded, hoping that that would be sufficient responses.

Bilbo waited until they'd finished chewing, it was odd that they'd all taken a bite of something at the same time, before getting them back on topic so to speak. "So in short, either someone's trying to kill me because they just don't like having me as part of the royal family for whatever reason, or these attacks on me are a diversion meant to hide some other purpose. How do we find out which one it is?"

"We'll arrange for more protection for you both, that's the most we can do besides what we're already doing. Whoever is behind this, they're smart and organized." Sighing, Balin got to his feet, his eyes meeting Thorin's. "I would suggest members of our company watching him. He's been the target thus far and we know we can trust them above all others."

"Arrange it." Getting to his feet as well Thorin nodded at his old friend, thankful when Balin told the boys to come with him so that they could discuss their own protective measures, just in case it was the royal family as a whole that would soon be under attack.

Once they were gone Thorin turned his attention to Bilbo, who'd gotten to his feet because everyone else had. "I…I told you that I would let no harm come to you and that there would not be a repeat of what happened in Dale. I have failed and-"

Not giving Thorin the chance to finish his sentence Bilbo moved in and threw his arms around the dwarf's waist, holding him tight as he spoke, wanting his own thoughts on this to be absolutely clear.

"None of this is your fault. It's the fault of whoever's doing this. You promise me here and now that you will do everything in your power to stay safe from harm and I'll do the same. And we'll both come out just fine in the end, you'll see."

"I would rather protect you than myself."

"And I'd rather do the same, even though I'd probably be more of a hindrance than a help."

"Never a hindrance to me."
Looking Good

The day after the garden incident Bilbo found himself in the care of his nephews, both of whom were quite proud that they had been chosen to protect their uncle and happy to taste test and eat everything he was cooking up in the kitchen to work off the stress of someone or someone's trying to kill him. After a couple hours the hobbit sat down with them at the prep table and asked them what they wanted to do for the rest of the day once the cheese buns he'd made for his little friends were done baking. Since they were stuck with him the least he could do was let them have some say in how they spent their time together before he was due to join Thorin for a meeting Balin thought he might help with.

The two brothers shared a look, which tipped Bilbo off that something was up with them. "Boys…?"

"We want you to make our hair blue like Uncle Thorin's!" Kili blurted out, Fili rolling his eyes but not contradicting the statement either.

"Make your hair-what on Middle Earth are you two talking about? I didn't turn Thorin's hair blue." Just the thought of what Thorin would look like with blue hair had him shaking his head. Not that Thorin wouldn't still be appealing, his body alone would unquestionably make up for the unfortunate hair color, but still…

"But you did turn it blue, when the light hits him right there's blue in his hair."

Understanding dawning Bilbo laughed, reaching over to pat Kili's hand. "I didn't do that, well I did but not the way you mean. I just put a special mixture in his hair to bring out his natural highlights. Like how my hair has different shades of brown and blond and even a little red in it. The light just makes his show up because it's so dark otherwise. Your hair is probably the same, Kili, though yours would be more like mine, Fili."

"So…I could have hair like his?"

"Yes, Kili, most likely." And seeing an opportunity to fix the boy's hair Bilbo leapt on it, telling him that he'd get him the stuff he needed if he liked, and then Kili could wash his hair now and he could fix it all up so that it looked as good as Thorin's.

Liking that idea Kili was all for it, and so after retrieving the bottles in question Bilbo gave the prince instructions as to which order to use them and then sent him off, leaving him and Fili alone for the time being while they waited for the buns to finish, then setting them aside to cool headed for Bilbo rooms, where Kili was to meet with them.

Taking a seat beside his uncle Fili asked how long Bilbo thought it would take to do Kili's hair once his brother got back.

"I'm not sure, I haven't really gotten close enough to see if his hair needs as much attention as Thorin's did. Plus braiding takes a while depending on what he wants and the type of braiding. I wonder if I can still do a fishtail braid." Bilbo gaze turned contemplative.

"A fishtail braid? What's that?"

"It's hard to explain, but if you'd let me borrow your hair for a few minutes I could probably show you."
Intrigued, Fili moved in closer, not used to other people playing with his hair but allowing it since Bilbo was family and he was curious as to what sort of braiding hobbits did. Uncle Thorin's hair certainly looked very nice, and the older dwarf had been getting quite a lot of admiring looks recently. Since the Durin men weren't exactly known as the most handsome dwarves in Erebor…it couldn't hurt to let the hobbit play with his hair a little.

Finger combing the hair that wasn't braided Bilbo considered undoing some of the braids already done, but knowing the importance dwarves placed on their braids opted not to and instead went to work with what he had, only having to restart a few times before it looked pretty good to his eyes. He'd been too tired by the time he'd gotten around to doing Thorin's braids to get terribly creative there.

He'd finished the braid and showed Fili how it looked, the prince liking it a lot and in the process of admiring it in a hand mirror when Kili knocked on the door and came in, immediately coming over to get a look at his brother's new braid. He really liked it too and wanted some of his own, and Fili wanted more in his hair too, and was willing to undo some of his to give Bilbo more to work with.

Getting Kili to sit down in front of him since the boy's hair was freshly washed, Bilbo got out a brush and comb and went to work untangling the dwarf's hair, carefully working through the thick, tangled masses that were even worse than Thorin's.

"It's weird having someone other than Fili do my hair. But nice too."

"Didn't Dis do your hair for you?"

"Only when I was really little."

"Who taught you how to braid?" Fili asked, remaining close to his uncle's side as he observed and occasionally reached out to toy with a piece of his brother's hair, intrigued by the change in its texture.

Smiling, Bilbo explained that when you were basically trapped inside your hobbit holes during the winter there were only so many things to do to keep one occupied, especially when you were a fairly active little hobbitling with more curiosity and energy than most. His mother had taught him all sorts of different ways to braid hair one winter, and he'd revisited the skills when she'd become too sick to do her own.

"What other kinds of braids do hobbits do?"

"Well there's a waterfall braid, the ladder, rope braiding, and basket weaving were some of her favorites. There are others, but those were the main ones she liked."

The two princes spoke in perfect tandem as they asked what basket woven braiding looked like.

"I'll show you once I have Kili's hair in order."}

Standing off to the side Thorin permitted himself a few moments to collect his thoughts and try and think clearly about what he had and hadn't learned. No easy task at the moment since anything involving his consort tended to affect his ability to see things clearly and without emotion, especially when even he knew he wasn't the most rational of dwarves. What he did know was that a subject of his had been discovered that morning with a knife through his heart and a confession written in charcoal on a nearby wall taking the blame for both attempts on the consort's life. Apparently he thought an alliance with the Shire would make them seem weak and vulnerable to their enemies and
lead to more deaths.

They'd found their would be killer, one would think, except for the fact that both Dwalin and Oin had looked at the wound and stated that there was something odd about it. In what way they couldn't explain in a way he understood, but they'd both stated that there was something off in the angle and way the blade had cut into the flesh.

Then there was the fact that the dwarf's sister had told him, to his face and with unwavering certainty, that yes Túrin had been against their king's choice in consort, but had he done what he'd 'confessed' to, he wouldn't have taken the easy way out and killed himself. His honor and pride would have never allowed him to go down that road. He believed her. And if she knew her brother's heart, then perhaps Túrin had been involved with what had happened, but he hadn't killed himself. Which meant he'd been part of a group, one who'd wanted to shift blame and the focus of the investigation going on. Or, perhaps, just hoping to ease the security on Bilbo again so that they'd have another chance at him with fewer barriers in their way, Thorin acknowledged, hands fisting at his side.

That was not going to happen.

"Much as we both hate the thought, Balin will make me want to put an axe in my head if I don't get you back in time for your meeting."

Acknowledging the validity of that statement with a nod of his head, Thorin came over and joined Dwalin and the rest of his guards on their way back through the mountain passageways, his mind on how to tell Bilbo about this latest turn of events without upsetting the hobbit. He would also have to make sure his halfling understood that he couldn't let his guard down, that he still had to be as vigilant as a hobbit knew how to be when it came to being in life threatening situations.

Not being at all used to this sort of thing, especially since he wasn't entirely sure how much stress someone as soft and emotional as a hobbit could handle, Thorin was still trying to figure out what to say to Bilbo when he arrived at the meeting place to find Balin waiting for him. But before he could greet the older dwarf or fill him in on what they'd discovered, the noise in the immediate vicinity picked up exponentially, drawing their attentions down the hallway to join the others in gaping at the three figures coming towards them.

Bilbo looked like his usual, very attractive self, so naturally he was worth a second and third look in Thorin's books usually, but his two nephews looked so different that he couldn't stop staring at them instead. They were his blood, his sister's boys, so naturally he had a soft spot for them even when they made him want to pull every strand of hair from his head. And even loving them that much he'd still have said that they looked like Durins and therefore weren't the handsomest of dwarves regardless of what Bilbo seemed to think, but today…well today the boys had a reason to be strutting like they'd defeated Smaug themselves as they escorted Bilbo over to him.

They had braiding in their hair the likes of which he'd never seen, and Fili's hair glowed like freshly polished gold in the light from the torches while Kili's showed hints of blue like his own. The closer the three got the bigger their grins got, all of them very pleased with themselves it seemed.

"I see you've been playing with someone else's hair today." Nodding in greeting to his consort Thorin hoped it wasn't obviously that he was a little annoyed that Bilbo had been playing around with someone else's hair and beard. The fact that the two were his nephews helped a little, but still…

"Yeah, and look at the back!" Turning around Kili showed off the waterfall braiding that Bilbo had done there, before telling his brother to show off his new hairstyle to their uncle, spinning Fili around to show off the braid work when his brother just rolled his eyes at him.
"It looks like basket weaving." Intrigued Thorin reached out to touch, impressed at the creativity and uniqueness of it. It would start a craze among his people, he didn't doubt it.

"If you like them I could try out some different braids on your hair next time. I didn't try anything fancy with yours because you weren't awake to tell me what you'd like. You wouldn't believe how many different ways I styled their hair before they settled on these looks."

"I'd like that."

Naturally Dis chose that moment to break through the crowds, having heard her sons' names on far too many tongues in the vicinity for her not to want to find out what the idiots had done now. Then she got a look at her boys and forgot all about yelling at them, instead flipping out over how elegant and handsome they looked for once. Of course when she found out that Bilbo was responsible for their new hairstyles she was surprised, but she thanked him warmly for what he'd done and it was really the first, honest kind words she'd had for him which had him beaming back at her.

Then she was back to fussing over her boys and they left her to it.

Since he wasn't a part of the meeting, he had other things to do and had only been waiting to make sure that Thorin showed up, Balin made his excuses and wished them a good meeting. "Oh, and before I forget, we had a letter from your Shire's Thain, Consort, about the delegation they'll be sending at the end of the month to do some trading. In it he asked that you be informed that a Haymatch Bofin would be coming. I assume he's a friend of yours."

"Hay-Haymatch is coming here?" As the dwarves watched Bilbo's cheeks went bright red, his eyes sparking with fury as his little hands fisted at his sides. "He's sending Haymatch here?! How dare he that-that-inhospitable, tight pursed, deformed earred son of an Orc! I am going to write him such a nasty letter for this-he's going to double in size from all the stress eating he's going to be doing imagining what I'm going to do to him when I get my hands on him!"

And then Bilbo stomped his foot and said some things in Elvish that no one understood but which were obviously not nice in nature.

All quiet around them, no dwarf had ever seen a truly pissed off hobbit before, they waited in silence to see what the adorably ruffled creature would do next.

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Flushing bright red as he realized everyone was staring at him, Bilbo could only be thankful none of them had understood what he'd said in Elvish. As it was he'd only switched to that language because there were much worse things to call someone in that tongue than his own. Dwarves probably had even worse words to call a person, and he wish he knew them so that he could at least mentally think them, and he didn't even care about what that said about him because he was just that furious. How dare he send Haymatch here, knowing about their past history? And that had to be the only reason the Thain would send him, there could be no other reason, and that-wait...why would the Thain want Haymatch around for a couple days? Just what was that sly, unconscionable, unworthy of calling himself a hobbit Thain of his up to?

"Bilbo."

Jerking a little at the feel of Thorin's hand on his shoulder Bilbo looked up at him. "I'm sorry, did you say something before?" Great, now he was ignoring Thorin and no doubt holding the man's meeting up. Oh he was so mad right now!
"This man they're sending, he's a threat to you?"

"A threat? Oh no, Thorin, not at all." Bilbo patted Thorin's had reassuringly, knowing that his husband was concerned and not trying to insult him. "The last time we got into a fight I punched him once and he cried like a little girl."

"You punched someone?"

Taking a little offense to the shock on Kili's face Bilbo gave him a sharp look. "I'll have you know I broke his nose in THREE places."

"Why did you punch him?" Fili wanted to know, asking the question on everyone's mind.

Opening and closing his mouth a couple times, Bilbo finally settled on stating that it was a long story and didn't they have a meeting to get to?

And not waiting for them to agree Bilbo said goodbye to Balin again and then headed into the meeting room to take a seat beside the one he knew was reserved for Thorin, mentally praying that that was where he was supposed to sit. After several nerve-wracking moments the others started to come in after him, taking their respective seats around the table with Thorin taking his seat beside him. Looking over at him, how could he not, Bilbo felt only a little better when Thorin said they'd be discussing this later before turning his attention back to his people.

And since he needed an explanation for Thorin, his husband was not a patient man, Bilbo forced himself to take some deep and calming breaths while he turned his mind back to its early thoughts, though in a less bloodthirsty frame of mind.

Why did his former Thain want him knowing that Haymatch was coming?

First of all it went without saying that the Thain knew of his and Haymatch's past together. It might not have been spoken about their faces but their backs had certainly felt the heat. Constantly. But on the flip side the Thain had known them since they were mere hobbitlings and therefore knew their personalities well. Haymatch was not the hobbit he'd once been. He'd crack under pressure and the idea of him being able to so much as raise his voice in Thorin's presence was beyond laughable. That meant that even if the Thain had ordered him to cause trouble Haymatch wouldn't have the spine to even try regardless of any motivation he might have to do otherwise. So maybe this little note of his coming visit had just been to upset him, or make Thorin curious about this person who was deserving of special mention. But that didn't make a lot of sense either because if that was the case Haymatch would blab the whole story for fear of angering Thorin and-and then the dwarves would be aware that hobbits actually were occasionally attracted to their same gender. He couldn't see the Thain wanting that. And if he did want that then this was a stupid way to go about it because the idea that Thorin could ever see someone like Haymatch as competition in any way was laughable, and in fact-oh.

This…this could be it, Bilbo realized as his heart started to beat wildly in his chest. Arthur had said that he needed to tell Thorin about his own preferences because dwarves were just too thick headed to get anything resembling subtle hints. He hadn't done so yet because he didn't want to be rejected or have all hopes dashed of course, but he also hadn't been able to think of a way to bring it up without just blurting the whole thing out and hoping for the best.

But in this case Thorin had made it clear they were going to discuss his reaction to the letter, and that meant, if he told the truth, it would all come out so to speak.

Provided he could find the courage over the course of the meeting. Oh boy.
So what will it be ladies and gentlemen? Shall I string them along longer or should Bilbo tell him the truth? Your votes will decide.
The Truth

The votes came in, holy crap did they ever come in, and honesty won, which is good since that's what I was hoping for. So enjoy!

The Truth

Thorin had never wanted a meeting to end so badly before, and that was saying something given the fact that most days he'd sooner bash his head into a boulder than go to one. Thus far Bilbo had been quiet during the whole meeting, obviously lost in thought, and it was eating at him that he didn't know what those thoughts were. Or who this Haymatch Bofin person was and why his very name caused such a violent reaction in his consort, to the point where Bilbo had apparently once broken the other hobbit's nose. He was also getting the distinct impression that Bilbo thought that the Thain's decision to send this Bofin fellow to Erebor had more to do with upsetting his hobbit than the unknown hobbit's trading skills. Bilbo was not the violent sort, not really, so his consort's reaction... was not a good sign about what was to come.

Thankfully all his people were curious about what had gotten the consort's hair in a twist, he didn't have a beard so that saying was out, so the meeting went fairly quickly since none of them were really that interested in fighting or hashing anything important out. Plus word had gone out that upsetting the consort was a very good way to really anger Thorin, and given the halfling's volatile state at the moment the dwarves were afraid to raise their voices least they set him off again and incur their king's wrath in the process.

Finally it was over and the other dwarves started slowly making their way out of the room, obviously dragging their feet because they were just as curious as their king when it came to the reason behind the consort's earlier outbursts. But since the hobbit didn't even seem aware of them, not to mention the cold looks their king was giving them, the council members had soon all vacated the meeting hall, the guards helpfully following after them and closing the doors behind them, leaving the royals to their discussion.

Well aware of the fact that Bilbo was off in his own little world Thorin shifted his chair around so that he was facing the hobbit, then got out of his chair and lifting the other man's chair up and turned it, with Bilbo still on it, so that their chairs were facing each other.

That got the hobbit's attention.

"Where is-how long has this room been empty?" A flush came to the halfling's cheeks, which made him look that much cuter when paired with his hair, wilder than usual from running his fingers through his curls earlier.

"Not long." Thorin wanted to smile at the picture Bilbo made but forced himself to adopt a more stern expression as he stated that the time had come to explain.

"Yes, yes I suppose it is." Bilbo sighed. "I've tried and tried to think of why the Thain would do this, what his hidden motivation is because there has to be one, but for the life of me I can't see what exactly he hopes to gain from this. So all I can do at this point is tell you what his motivations could be and hopefully you'll be able to figure it out since you're probably much better at thinking like a politician than I am."

Thorin was pretty sure that there were any number of people in Middle Earth who would disagree with that statement, at the top of their lungs in many cases, but he told Bilbo to go ahead anyway, he
was listening.

"What makes the most sense to me is that he knew the news would upset me, since he's probably still
ingry at me for marrying you, so he's sending Haymatch here to annoy the both of us. At first I
thought maybe he was sending him to actually cause problems, you know really upset us, but then I
remembered this is Haymatch we're talking about and he's not the hobbit he once was. Not that he
was ever strong or tough for a hobbit, he was a Mama's boy from the start which my own mother
warned me about, but I was one too so I disagreed at the time. Of course my mother was a Took and
Haymatch's was a Sacksville, so really, in hindsight, my argument didn't hold water, which she told
me at the time but I didn't listen. Which, in my defense, not that I'm saying she was wrong because
obviously she wasn't, but in my defense she was Took and taking their advice, especially when it
comes to life changing decisions, can go very badly awry."

Getting that nerves was making the hobbit ramble didn't help much, especially when Thorin had a
feeling that Bilbo could tell him what he wanted to know and he wouldn't realize it because it would
be lost in a story or rant. So he took a stab in the dark and asked if the two had once been friends
who'd parted on bad terms.

"We were friends when we were hobbitlings, though I was actually closer to Hamfast, Drogo and
Rosie. Haymatch and I—we haven't spoken for over two decades. But once upon a time we-." Sighing,
Bilbo ran a hand through his curls in a show of agitation. "You know, this is why I don't get
him sending Haymatch in the first place. I mean at least on my end the old wounds are healed and
seeing him isn't going to open them up again because hello, we've lived in the same village together
the whole of our lives without me killing him, so obviously I've come to terms with the fact that my
wish that he be eaten by Orcs is never going to happen."

"You want him to be eaten by Orcs?"

"I'm not proud of it…and I did hope his death was quick before they ate him."

Chuckling, how could he not given the adorably guilty look on his hobbit's face, Thorin leaned
forward in his chair, bracing his hands on his knees. "What did he do to upset you so? Another
garden destroyer?"

"No." A deep breath. "He broke my heart."

Of all the answers he had been expecting, that hadn't even occurred to him. But now that it had been
stated, Thorin's response was automatic. "I don't understand."

Remembering what Arthur had said to him, and wanting to buy himself a little more time, Bilbo
thought it best to start at the most obvious point, which meant an explanation about some misleading
beliefs about hobbits. "I know that most of the other races think that hobbits are never born desiring
those of their same gender, but that's not true. It's just a well kept secret with us. In general other
hobbits pretend not to know the truth while talking behind our backs and pushing us towards proper
hobbit marriages every chance they get. Most give in and do as society expects, but some, such as
myself, choose permanent bachelorhood. If they're lucky and find someone who loves them and is
strong enough to withstand the pressure put on them by others, they live together and to the outside
world they're explained as confirmed bachelors who chose to share a hobbit hole for company
because some oddity makes them unsuited for marriage." His smile became edged with sad
memories. "For a foolish time I thought that that was what Haymatch and I would do, but he
couldn't—he wasn't strong enough to be who he was."
Bilbo tried to read Thorin's face but found he couldn't, his stomach butterflies spontaneously giving birth to rabbits, which were jumping up and down like it was mating season and they wanted to give birth to more rabbits to kick at his gut and make him feel more nauseated.

"Thorin?" Using all his courage Bilbo set his hands on Thorin's arms, moving them up and down in what he hoped was a comforting manner given the tension of the muscles flexing under his hands.

"He was your lover?"

"A very long time ago. It's been so long since I've been with-." Blushing at what he'd been about to admit to, sex was talked about even less than 'odd' hobbits at home, Bilbo quickly changed the subject by blurtting out what he most wanted to know. "Are you mad at me or the Thain? I thought about telling you before now about me, but you said you wanted our marriage to be in name only so I didn't think it would matter to you."

Waiting and not getting a response, Thorin just continued to stare at him like he'd grown three more heads, Bilbo dropped his hands to his sides and got to his feet, genuinely surprised that they could keep him up at this point. "I'll...we can talk about this later, once you've had time to absorb what I- I'll leave you to your thoughts. I'm sorry for any trouble any of this might cause you."

Moving away and along the table, making himself walk normally instead of fleeing the way he wanted to, Bilbo stopped when Thorin called his name, turning around to face him as he came up from behind. Putting on a determinedly brave face Bilbo asked what he wanted.

"I'm not angry at you." Reaching out Thorin's hand was an unbelievable comfort as his fingers stroked through Bilbo's curls, the familiarity of the gesture a balm to the wounds that had just opened when Thorin hadn't said anything. "Though I believe I'm going to kill your Thain when next we meet."

That had not been the response he'd been expecting, and Bilbo would have made a jest about how his former Thain inspired that sort of rage in people, but he could see from the look in his husband's eyes that Thorin was dead serious about wanting to kill the old, conniving hobbit. And as much as he didn't like Bingo, especially right now, he also knew that he couldn't let Thorin murder him either.

"Haymatch isn't a threat to you, Thorin. Sending him was a jab at me, yes, but hardly one that injures. It just makes me mad. And even if he were stupid enough to tell Haymatch to start something he wouldn't have the nerve. His spine has gotten weaker by the year, and it's been a lot of years."

"That's not why I want to kill him."

"Why then?"

"For lying to me about you."

Aware that dwarves had bigger egos and therefore more pride than most every other race in Middle Earth, Bilbo knew that Thorin could just be angry that the Thain had manipulated him again, but still, this was his chance to know exactly where he stood and he was self aware enough to know he needed to act now or regret it later. "Why would his decision to lie about my romantic preferences matter to you since you have no interest in bedding me?"

When Thorin's hand slid down from his curls to cup the back of his neck Bilbo had a moment to wonder what the dwarf was about to do and then Thorin was leaning in and pressing their lips together in a kiss that made it quite clear that he hadn't been the only one holding back where the other was concerned.
Surging forward, knowing now that it hadn't been foolish at all to hope and want, Bilbo got on tip toes and wrapped his arms around Thorin's neck as he returned the passion of Thorin's kiss with equal fervent. It might have been a long time since either of them had let this particular aspect of their natures take control, but that just meant that they had a great deal of needs and wants pent up that wanted to finally be appeased and were as they made up for their rustiness with the power of their desire to FINALLY get somewhere with the other.

When the hand Thorin wasn't using to move his head as he wanted it slid under his shirt to stroke the soft skin of his back Bilbo groaned his approval, running his hands up and down Thorin's sides to appreciate the muscles he could feel tensing up under his hands. He wanted skin to skin, but Thorin was currently wearing way too many clothes, which he informed the dwarf in a daze when their lips parted to catch their breath.

"As are you."

Shivering at the huskiness of Thorin's voice, by all the gods and goddesses but he was going to be hearing that voice in his sleep until the day he died, Bilbo couldn't have been happier when Thorin proved just how strong he was by lifting him up and seating him on the meeting table. Spreading his legs when the dwarf moved in close again Bilbo tried not to be too loud in showing his enjoyment when the kissing started again, some small part of his proper Baggins brain aware of the fact that this wasn't the time or the place for this sort of thing. But then Thorin's hands were squeezing his rear and he couldn't have kept quiet if his life depended on it.

The increasingly loud knocking on the table went unnoticed by Bilbo as a result, but Thorin was trained to always be aware and so caught on that it wasn't either of them making the noise and broke off the kiss, protectively jerking Bilbo up against him while looking over the hobbit's shoulders.

Dwalin's name left the dwarf king's lips on a growl.

"None of that, Laddie. You know there are places you're supposed to be getting to now, however much you might wanna stay here and who could blame ye? Except my brother, who will have your head if you mess up your schedule today. And that, knowing him, might lead to him ruining your evening, which would mean none of this later in better surroundings."

Groaning in embarrassment Bilbo buried his face against the side of Thorin's neck, perverted enough to enjoy the dwarf's delicious scent and the scrape of the man's beard while he was there. What they were saying he didn't bother to listen to, though he was deliriously grateful when he heard the doors close, signaling they were once again alone and not make a complete spectacle of themselves.

"Come out now, he's gone."

"I won't be able to look him in the eyes for weeks." Groaning again at the thought Bilbo was completely mortified. "I was so loud and this room echoes!"

The sensation of Thorin's body shaking against his in laughter had Bilbo straightening up to glare at him, which Thorin seemed to find that much funnier.

And then Thorin was cupping his face between his hands, the touch so gentle and intimate Bilbo forgot about making faces at him. "I have to go now. After dinner though…I hope you will join me in my quarters."

Understanding what he was being asked, Bilbo had to resist the urge to squeal like a girl or worse, start ripping Thorin's clothes off then and there because now he knew the dwarf would find that idea as splendid as he did. So he settled for nodding his head and beaming a smile, his own getting that
much bigger when Thorin smiled back.

"Good. And one more thing you need to know before I go, I don't want you hearing it from someone else or misunderstanding." Quickly Thorin explained where he'd been earlier and what they'd possibly learned about the earlier attacks. He made sure to stress the fact that he was far from convinced it was over and that Bilbo was to trust no one outside the family and the company.

"It does sound fishy. Unfortunately. And I will be careful, I promise." Especially since he couldn't go to bed with Thorin if he was dead or badly injured, Bilbo added, squirming a little on the table as his thoughts turned to just what he wanted to do with Thorin once they were in a bed with no interruptions until morning.

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Forcing himself to leave his hobbit when all he wanted to do was ravish Bilbo on the meeting table until they both collapsed and had to be carried out of the room after breaking said table to pieces, Thorin had to content himself with one last hard, bruising kiss before making his goodbyes. The fact that his consort so obviously didn't want him to go was definitely a bandage on his ego, especially since he'd apparently been oblivious to the fact that his hobbit had been pining for him the whole time, just as he had. It would have been embarrassing really, if not for the fact that the halfling had apparently been just as oblivious to his own desire.

Oh but he was going to maim that Thain when he got his hands on the little weasel's neck. Killing a hobbit might be like stabbing a fish in a barrel under normal circumstances, but he was willing to sink that low at the moment. All this time he could have been bedding his consort but no, he'd been keeping his hands to himself as much as he was able because he thought Bilbo would never welcome more intimate touches.

"Interesting faces to be making, considering you're likely getting very lucky later tonight."

Turning his head to give Dwalin a quelling look, which didn't cow the other dwarf in the slightest but at least kept him somewhat quiet, Thorin turned his thoughts to other things, namely all the things he wanted to do with Bilbo once they were alone again.

Tonight was their real wedding night, the new start to their marriage without any misconceptions in the way. He'd talk to Balin, see if his schedule for tomorrow couldn't be pushed back a little so that he and Bilbo would be able to sleep in and enjoy each other's company a bit longer, the way a real married couple should. He hadn't fought for that time before because he hadn't see the point of it, but now…they had a lot of time to make up for, and he intended to make up for every lost minute.
Note: And for those of you who are sad the UST is over, there's still the L word they have to realize and deal with too heh. Also sorry for where this ended, I ran out of time. The scene will continue into the next chapter, promise.

A Wedding Night

Bilbo had never expected to ever have a wedding night, not a real one even when he was young and of marriageable age. And technically he and Thorin already had their wedding night as they'd been married for weeks now and had shared a bed on a number of occasions since then, Bilbo reminded himself as he sat on his bench in his garden, his little friends napping around him as they’d gorged themselves on the fresh cheese buns earlier and weren't up to doing much of anything. So really, getting all worked up about the night ahead was utterly ridiculous, especially when one considered the fact that he wasn't going to the dwarf's bed a virgin and knew what to expect for the most part.

Though it had been so long since he'd had another man's naked body pressed against his, Bilbo silently admitted to himself, that he practically was one. As it was his memories of those events so to speak were sorta faded and unfocused, mostly because he'd done his best to block out the fact that he’d ever been foolish enough to allow Haymatch Bofin into his bed. But surely it was one of those skills that you never really forgot no matter how long it had been, and Thorin was the take charge type anyway so he could simply follow the man's lead and they’d be just fine. Oh please by all the goddess and gods let them be all right. Because while he’d studied up on dwarves as best he could back in the Shire and since he'd come to Erebor, Bilbo was well aware that he was beyond ignorant when it came to the intimate details so to speak.

"This would be so much less stressful if I could just ask someone about this." Bilbo muttered to the dust bunny snoring away in his lap, having passed out from all the petting he'd gotten. "Brides and grooms can ask their parent for advice about this sort of thing and not be embarrassed." Not that his parents would have any idea how dwarves mated, but at least his own mother would have comforted him while his father died of shock at being asked such a question. Actually, scratch that, he'd be just as embarrassed to talk about it with either one of them, but he'd rather be mortified now than later when he and Thorin were in bed together.

And asking any of the dwarves he'd gotten friendly with for advice was also out of the question for a number of reasons.

First and foremost was the fact that he wasn't comfortable with discussing the topic to begin with with people he didn't actually know that well, and second was the fact that he would sooner die of embarrassment than admit to any dwarf he knew that Thorin and he hadn't once been intimate since they’d gotten married. He’d permanently go into the ground laughing first. There was also the fact that he wouldn't want to offend anyone with his questions, especially when he was still in the process of winning over those closest to Thorin. He was only having so much success there, and asking them personal questions of this nature would not endear himself to them at all.

Though Fili and Kili would probably find his stuttering and blushing absolutely hilarious, brats that they so often were.

The basic mechanics of the whole thing had to be similar regardless of race, Bilbo told himself, and he’d seen Thorin naked even if he hadn't been in a sexual frame of mind at the time, so he knew that the dwarf's body wasn't that different from a hobbit's. Except in terms of muscles and size and the fact that he was quite sure Thorin would be as forceful and demanding in bed as out of it and that-
Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.

Going as red as one of his tomatoes Bilbo couldn't help but wring his hands in front of him as he stared down at them.

Worried he might start hyperventilating, it could happen, Bilbo forced himself to concentrate on his breathing, telling himself over and over again that he had no reason to worry. Even if he was out of practice, and smaller and less developed in certain areas compared to a dwarf, Thorin wanted him and had made that quite clear. He'd just follow the other man's lead and everything would be fine.

Please fates make it so!

Thorin spent the rest of his afternoon cursing the fact that so little was known about hobbits, especially since he'd only just learned that day that one of the most important preconceptions he'd had about the race was wrong. Hobbits did occasionally desire their own sex, and his halfling was one of those hobbits. He could take Bilbo as his lover, strip the other man bare and kiss and stroke every inch of his consort's lush little body until his hobbit begged him for relief from the most pleasurable of tortures. At least that was where his mind had been focused until it occurred to him that having never bedded a hobbit before, he had no idea if their mating practices were the same as his own's.

In his head Thorin knew that Bilbo wasn't really delicate, that the hobbit was actually fairly sturdy despite his size and gentle manner, but those rational voices were drowned out by the more irrational side of him that said Bilbo was too delicate to withstand the force of his own desire for the halfling. He'd waited so long for him, had spent hour upon hour dreaming of what he would do to his consort if given the chance, never once taking in the man's small frame into consideration or the fact that the hobbit was probably used to the gentlest of touches.

It ate at him too, knowing that soon another hobbit would be coming to his mountain, one who had known Bilbo intimately for years in comparison to the short time Bilbo had been his. That there was no love lost between them, at least on his consort's side, was only a slight balm to the dark, infected wounds that opened up at the mere thought of anyone touching what was his.

Recognizing the darkness of that need to possess and own, the scars inflicted from his gold sickness still fresh and tender, Thorin's stomach rolled at the very idea that once again he would cause harm to someone important to him because he was too enslaved by his own desires to see beyond them.

But he couldn't reject the hobbit either, both because Thorin knew he couldn't resist his consort now that he knew he was wanted and because even when he'd been in shock he'd taken note of the look that had come into Bilbo's eyes when the halfling had thought he was being rejected earlier. And he was never, ever going to be the person who put that look in his hobbit's eyes ever again. He'd cut his hands off at the wrists first.

So he was going to have to find a way to make this work.

With that in mind Thorin carved time out to pay a quick visit to Oin, ordering the man's assistants out of the room and closing the door behind them afterwards.

Assuming that Thorin wanted more news about the suicide slash murder case Oin scowled at his king and told him, again, that there wasn't anything new to tell him. The nature of the kill wound was suspicious, so he wasn't ruling out the possibility that the dwarf had been forced to take his own life, but he couldn't tell him more than that. And he didn't appreciate being hounded when he'd already
told Thorin this early in the day.

"That's not why I'm here."

"Oh, well why on Middle Earth didn't you say so?"

Thorin thought about pointing out that he hadn't been given the chance, but thought better of it. "My reason for visiting is my consort."

"Your consort?" Oin blinked at his owlishly. "Well he can't be hurt or you'd be in a tear, so what about the boy?"

"I was wondering about hobbits, the strength of their bodies. He's determined to work that garden of his himself and I want to make sure he's up for it." That was the most believable lie he'd been able to come up with since Thorin was sure he'd sooner marry an elf than admit that he and his consort had never had sex.

Fiddling with his ear horn Oin seemed to think over the question before answering it with an understanding smile, reaching over at the same time to give Thorin's hand a pat. "No need to worry about your little hobbit, your majesty. I might not know a lot about them, but I talked with the boy myself when he came here and they aren't so very different from us. They've got strong bones and fine constitutions, he's hardly been sick a day in his life apparently. Just keep an eye that he doesn't overdo, as he keeps an eye on you." The old dwarf's eyes actually twinkled for a moment. "When I was done asking him about himself, he asked if there was anything he should know about you. He worries you work too hard."

Trying and failing to hide his surprise Thorin didn't know what to say to that. And the man's words did reassure him somewhat, but he imagined that Bilbo only knew slightly more about dwarves than dwarves knew about hobbits so he still felt some unease about the whole thing.

Shaking his head Oin muttered about needless worriers before asking Thorin if there was anything else he needed to know before they both got back to work.

"No, my apologies for interrupting."

"Then I wish you a good evening, Your Majesty."

Thinking that he was very much hoping it would be Thorin nodded and returned the sentiment before leaving the room to worry elsewhere for a while more before it was time to join his family for the final meal of the day.

) Come dinner time Bilbo was rather grateful that they were having a meal together before heading back to Thorin's rooms. If that hadn't been the case he'd have had to worry about what to wear going into the man's rooms like the blushing bride he was feeling like. Which was somewhat mortifying really, given his gender and age, but his mind was not the most logical of places at the moment since he'd done nothing for the past few hours except think about sex. He was so wired at the moment that he'd even had to slip into his own rooms earlier to-ah-ease some of the pressure least he make a very bad first impression on his husband later.

Cheeks flushing pink on and off, Bilbo could feel the heat of his cheeks mocking him throughout the meal as he did his best not to be too obvious about wanting to do nothing but stare at Thorin, who in turn kept shooting him the occasional hot glance that had him fighting the urge to squirm in his chair. Thank goodness for the boys and Dis, none of whom were ever at a loss for words and carried the
conversation completely on their own as they discussed all the positive responses the boys had gotten when it came to their new hairstyles, as well as the death of the possible traitor and just their days in general. They were too used to Thorin's silences to think anything of that, and Bilbo did his best to contribute just enough that his wandering, lustful thoughts weren't glaringly obvious. Or so he hoped.

One thing they did notice was that Bilbo wasn't eating nearly as much as he usually did, and when Fili called him on it Bilbo brushed it off as being a result of eating too many cheese buns earlier. This was of course a lie, a hobbit always had room for more, but his present appetite wasn't for food and the sooner this blasted meal was over the sooner he could, hopefully, appease the need for what he did want.

"Sure you aren't coming down with something?" Kili had been fond of Bilbo before the hairstyling lessons, but now that the hobbit had actually managed to make him look really appealing to the girls he wasn't about to let anything happen to his uncle.

"I'm fine, Kili, I promise. If I was sick you'd know it." Hobbits rarely ever got sick, but when they did it was hard to miss. A sick hobbit was a very, very unhappy hobbit.

Trusting that their sweet, innocent little uncle would never lie to them, the brothers dropped the subject and went back to their usual chatter, Dis watching Bilbo and Thorin both a little closer than normal for the rest of the meal, both aware enough to rein themselves in for the most part least she decide to have some fun at their expense.

Finally the meal was over, the boys jumping out of their seats to go out with friends while Dis, after giving Thorin and Bilbo each a hard, piercing look, surprised them both by wishing them a good night with a small, knowing smile on her face before making an exit out of the room.

Doing the boys' hair had certainly earned him some brownie points where she was concerned, Bilbo marveled as he pushed back his chair and got out of the way so that the servants could see to the dishes and such. He had a moment's pang, as he often did at such times, that he should be cleaning up after himself and not them, but then Thorin was standing in front of him and that pretty much wiped every thought from his head in a snap.

Taking the arm he was being offered, Bilbo couldn't help but smile at Thorin despite his nerves as they headed out of the room and down the hallway that would eventually lead to Thorin's quarters.

"Did you write your letter already?"

"My letter?"

"The one to your Thain you were talking about earlier."

"Oh! I forgot all about that."

Chuckling, Thorin gave him a knowing look that had Bilbo's toes curling in reflex.

Arriving at their destination Thorin opened the door, the look he gave Bilbo making it clear this was his chance to back out before there would be no backing out.

Swallowing hard Bilbo let go of Thorin's arm and walked through the doorway.

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Walking in after his hobbit Thorin closed the door behind them and then turned to give Bilbo his full
attention. He could see that he wasn't the only one who was a little nervous, but his halfling hadn't
hesitated to come in either, and he wasn't going to talk himself out of believing what else he saw in
Bilbo's eyes the way he had the few other times he'd thought he'd spied interest or desire there.
They'd both made their desire for the other clear earlier that day, and he wasn't about to let nerves get
in either of their way now.

So taking the steps necessary Thorin closed the gap between them and lowered his head while Bilbo
shifted up and onto the balls of his feet to meet him part way, their lips just brushing against the
other's for a testing moment before far more serious kissing was had with Thorin's fingers buried in
Bilbo's curls while the halfling's fingers dug into the dwarf's shoulders for support as he melted
against Thorin's strong frame.

In some working part of his brain Thorin thought that he wanted to kiss his hobbit for hours, learn
everything there was to know about Bilbo's mouth before working his way down the body vibrating
so eagerly against his own, but instincts too long denied beat the hell out of that voice in no time, the
kissing becoming urgent as the kisses deepened and got decidedly more wet and dirty.

Loving the small sounds Bilbo was making in the back of his throat, he'd had a feeling his consort
wouldn't be the quiet type after his enthusiasm earlier, Thorin ended the contact so that he could
appreciate the noises more as he revisited the other man's neck and then continued up to give the
hobbit's ear lobe a nip, surprised by the full body shudder and erotic as hell groan that action elicited.

"Sensitive?"

Bilbo's breathless yes did things to him Thorin couldn't even put into words, and spurred him on to
suck and nibble the length of each of the hobbit's ears, the man's reactions enough to drive him over
the edge even before Bilbo started rubbing their lower halves together urgently, dragging their
erections against the other's while making those sounds that drove him crazy with need.

"Thorin…please…"

"What do you need?" He'd give him anything he wanted.

"Take me to bed. Your bed." To punctuate the sentiment Bilbo messily pressed their lips together for
an urgent kiss, fingers flexing beseechingly.

Growling a sound of agreement Thorin slid his hands down Bilbo's back and then grasping the
hobbit's thighs jacked him up and shifted his hands around to adjust his hold as he carried Bilbo over
to the bed, carefully setting him down onto the bed before turning his attention to stripping down to
his skin.

The way Bilbo watched him do it, those tawny eyes getting bigger and hungrier, Thorin could feel
the man's gaze like phantom hands stroking over his body. And when he was naked Thorin took a
seat on the side of the bed and shifted over to begin undoing the buttons of Bilbo's shirt, seeing the
way Bilbo flushed and looked away from him.

Reaching over Thorin grasped Bilbo's chin, stroking fingers over his cheek. "What's wrong?"

A bit more squirming, and then shyly the hobbit met his eyes. "I don't look at all like a dwarf."

Understanding dawning Thorin let go of Bilbo's chin and moved to stroke his fingers through the
tousled curls he loved so much before he used both hands to pull the hobbit's tucked in shirt out,
sliding his hands underneath to caress the soft, smooth skin of Bilbo's belly.

"You look like my consort." He told him. "And there is no one I desire more in my bed."
Truly Married

Note: Sorry this took so long, my laptop was in the shop and there are just some things I'm not comfortable writing in the library lol. Hope it was worth the wait and if not, sorry again!

Truly Married

In the sensible Baggins part of his brain Bilbo was pretty sure that Thorin's words were only meant to reassure him and convince him to let the dwarf strip him of his clothes, but his Took side, combined with his hormones and own foolish hopes and dreams where Thorin was concerned, overrode that voice and had Bilbo breaking out in a wide grin before he scrambled over to take a seat in his Thorin's lap. And once there Bilbo wrapped his arms around Thorin's neck and wholeheartedly applied himself to demonstrating just how much he adored the man for saying such sweet things to him even though they couldn't possible be true.

And naturally he was aware when Thorin's fingers got busy unbuttoning and unlacing his clothing, but at this particular point in time Bilbo couldn't have claimed to care less because the dwarf's hands felt so good touching his bare skin. He was never going to get tired of kissing his husband's mouth. It just could never happen.

Of course Thorin couldn't remove all his clothes in their present positions, which was unfortunate on a number of levels, and so soon enough Bilbo found himself on his back once more, arching his body so that Thorin could easily do away with the remainder of his clothes so that he was naked on the bed too. He had to fight the urge to cover himself or look away again, but how could he look away with Thorin's eyes roaming over his body the way they were, a blushing Bilbo's brain slowly realized. Because seeing and feeling just how Thorin was looking at his bare body, his blush increasing right along with his desire now that he could see that no, Thorin's words hadn't been empty reassurance, but the absolute truth. The dwarf's eyes said plainly that he liked what he saw, and when those rough hands moved to touch him Bilbo couldn't have been happier, lifting his own hands to touch as well.

He's never touched so muscled and strong a body before, been free to explore the strength of a warrior and the battle scars that came with that. The different textures of flesh that were a testament to Thorin's prowess on the battlefield as well as the callouses and long healed burns from his husband's work in forges and mines. Not to mention the hair on his dwarf's chest which felt very lovely against his own, all were new to Bilbo and he gloried in them as he stroked and traced as much as he could, only able to reach so much as Thorin's much bigger form kept him pinned down between him and the mattress.

Not that he was unhappy about that in the slightest. Far from it in fact. He liked the feeling of being at Thorin's mercy, in his husband's oh so capable and knowledgeable hands. He would be quite happy, Bilbo thought to himself as he met Thorin's passion kiss for kiss, touch for touch, if Thorin wished to ravish him every night!

When Thorin spoke again it was in the dwarf's native tongue, the majority of the words not ones Bilbo recognized except for the words for 'beautiful', 'jewel' and 'gold'. He wasn't sure how any of them applied to him, but the tone of voice Thorin used, so very sensual and growly, made Bilbo squirm in the best of ways, the hobbit wanting to return the favor.

And since Arthur had given him a list of words and phrases that would be most important, Bilbo waited until Thorin wasn't kissing along his jaw and was looking at him to very carefully say that he thought Thorin handsome in Khuzdul.
Blinking in surprise Thorin arched an eyebrow. "And where did you learn that?"

Since he had yet to start formal lessons Bilbo could understand the surprise, and so he explained about his list of words from his elvish friend while giving Thorin's shoulder a pat when the dwarf frowned at the idea that any elf had a grasp of the dwarves' secret language. "I'm sure he doesn't know that much, and he has lived a very long time you know. He was bound to pick some of it up."

"What he is is lucky I owe him a boon for protecting you in Dale."

Not wanting Thorin to lose track of what they were doing or continue to make veiled threats towards Arthur, Bilbo stroked his fingers up and down the thickly corded muscles of Thorin's arms, a teasing smile crossing his face as he impishly asked if Thorin was liable to lose all this muscle now that he was a king. That, he told the dwarf with mock seriousness, would be a real pity.

Chuckling at the mere thought, Thorin balanced his weight on one hand while lifting the other to run his fingers through Bilbo's messy curls as he assured him that that wouldn't happen.

"Good." To punctuate his point Bilbo pulled Thorin's head down so that he could slate their lips together once more, the kiss long and drawn out before the sneaky dwarf broke away from his grasp to nibble on his ears, which of course drove him quite mad with want given how much he already desired his husband.

And there was little reprieve for him when Thorin did finally leave his extremely sensitive ears alone, because then the dwarf kissed his way down his neck and then chest, stopping when he arrived at the nipples that were already hard nubs even before the blasted dwarf decided to torment them as well. And oh by the gods and goddesses he'd had no idea a beard would scrape so deliciously against his skin, the sensations the raspy hairs produced making Bilbo gasp and moan to a very undignified degree and volume. He sounded horribly wanton and loud to his own ears, but for the life of him Bilbo couldn't bring himself to try and control himself, much less ask Thorin to stop. He was fairly sure he'd never forgive the dwarf if he stopped any time soon, and kept his fingers threaded through his husband's thick hair in case he needed to make that clear a little forcefully.

"You moan so prettily for me, Little One."

Taking that to mean Thorin liked all the noise he was making, oh thank heavens, Bilbo was too embarrassed to comment and so instead made a pleading sound in the back of his throat, needing to encourage Thorin to keep doing what he was doing before he really embarrassed himself.

Thankfully Thorin either took pity on him or was as eager for more as he was, the dwarf turning his attention back to tormenting him with his clever mouth and rough beard to the point where Bilbo thought he'd agree to do just about anything Thorin might wish him to do.

Savoring every little sound he was teasing from his consort's lips, Thorin was never quite so glad that hobbits weren't at all like dwarves when it came to certain things. They were soft and curvy, with sensitive skin that quivered and flushed so prettily to his touch. And whereas his previous dwarvish lovers had been very direct and physical about what they wanted and getting it, Bilbo was so easily surrendering himself to him, offering his body up with absolute trust that he would please him.

With a few tugs of his hair for reminders, Thorin mentally tacked on with a smile, not minding the pain and pleasure of the action one little bit. But it had been far too long since he'd shared a bed with anyone in this way, and he'd been craving his hobbit for far too long to deny himself the pleasure of joining their bodies to continue simply sampling all Bilbo's body had to offer him.
Sliding his hands down and around Thorin purposefully gripped each of his hobbit's bum cheeks in his hands, kneading them with his fingers as he made his intention clear. "Later I am going to learn every inch of you, Halfling, but I don't think I can wait much longer to make you mine."

The fast nodding he got in return made him chuckle again, though this was the part he'd been most worried about leading up to this point. How well they would fit when it came to the most intimate of connections, when the difference in their sizes and race truly came into play?

Retrieving the vial of oil he'd placed within easy reach, Thorin allowed it to roll around in his closed fist for a moment before telling Bilbo to roll over. And seeing the startlement on the hobbit's face, did the halflings never join their bodies that way, Thorin decided he would ask about that later, since his intention wasn't to take the man from behind this time. No, he would see his Bilbo's face this first time.

"I mean only to make preparing you easier."

Bilbo again gave him a rather confused look but the hobbit did as he asked, Thorin biting off most of the long groan he made in response to the sight of the man's naked backside. It looked even more lush and inviting that the front, and that really shouldn't have been possible. His mouth literally watered at the thought of discovering what other places on Bilbo's body he would find that made the halfling squirm and whimper as deliciously as he had before.

But that would have to wait, if only because he was fairly sure he'd lose his mind if he didn't.

Popping open the vial Thorin quickly coated his fingers with the slick liquid, not wanting either of them to have to wait longer than was absolutely necessary. They'd waited long enough already. Giving the hobbit a soft warning of what he was about to do Thorin turned his attention to seeing just how far the hobbit could open for him, surprised by the ease with which his finger and then fingers could breech the man's entrance. Of course if Bilbo had spent as much time obsessing about this as he had, it stood to reason that the halfling had had to take care of himself as much as he had too. And the thought of those elegant fingers, which had touched him so possessively, moving over Bilbo's own body in search of relief had Thorin unable to help himself from shifting to cover Bilbo's body with his own once again, so that he could attack the man's sensitive ears yet again while the fingers on his free hand continued to stroke inside the hobbit's body.

The music of Bilbo chanting his name in hiccuped gasps and broken off moans were his reward, Thorin drawing them out of his hobbit while he relished the way his actions caused Bilbo to buck up and rub up against him desperately, the hobbit trying to get some relief but not in a position to do much more than take the pleasure he was getting that wasn't quite enough.

Thorin was curious in the still functioning corner of his brain as to whether or not Bilbo would tell him what he wanted if he tormented the hobbit long enough, but rather than regain his words the halfling seemed to lose them completely when pleased this way. That thought had Thorin making one last mental note to keep that fact in mind the next time they were arguing, before moving away so that he could flip his consort back onto his back, licking his lips over the picture Bilbo made before moving in to finally claim what was his.

He tried to be gentle, as gentle as he ever was anyway, but while Bilbo had lost his words except for his husband's name the hobbit's body had not forgotten how to move, and as soon as he was in position and trying to gently press inside the hobbit's body Bilbo immediately started dilating his body to draw Thorin in harder and faster, those neat little nails of his clawing at his sides as Bilbo gave Thorin a look that made it clear that his blushing consort would attempt to cause him serious harm if he didn't get on with it.
Saying to hell with being a gentleman, it wasn't really his thing anyway, Thorin used his body to open Bilbo's legs wider and then thrust deep until he bottomed out, growling the question if this was what his consort wanted.

"Yes!"

Chuckling, Bilbo hadn't lost all his words yet it seemed, Thorin let go of the last reins of control he'd held onto and focused solely on plundering the hell out of his hobbit's body until his consort came bucking and screaming his release under him.

Finding his own release wasn't hard to do afterwards, to say the least.

Eyes opening slowly the next morning, he was actually loathe to wake, Thorin wasn't at all surprised to find Bilbo's head tucked under his chin, the hobbit's body pressed firmly up against his. At this point he was actually used to sharing his bed with his consort, though this was the first time they were both naked as the day they'd been born. He certainly liked and preferred this change. Very much. And running his fingers up and down Bilbo's exposed spine Thorin couldn't help but lower the blankets a little more so that he could get a better look at the other man's body, which proved to be even more beautiful then he remembered from the night before. Like milk with honey in it, the freckles scattered here and there doing nothing to detract from the otherwise unmarked skin. Or it had been unmarked, Thorin thought with a wince, seeing easily the marks his beard had left over certain areas of the hobbit's flesh.

"What has you frowning?" Bilbo murmured, alerting him to the fact that the hobbit was awake again.

"Your skin is so delicate, I've rubbed you raw." And not all of it was going to be easily hidden by clothes either. Bilbo's poor neck was looking more than a little red, and Thorin couldn't imagine the hobbit was going to enjoy the stares he'd get over such an obvious claiming. Other than the brief kiss at their wedding, and his habit of stroking his consort's curls, there had never been anything his people could comment on when it came to physical evidence of his relationship with his hobbit.

That was no longer going to be the case from now on, especially if Bilbo's skin didn't toughen up some. Though if it didn't, the dwarf thought as he continued to stroke his hand up and down Bilbo's spine, well he'd be just fine with that personally.

"Some chamomile lotion will take care of the marks, don't worry. I enjoy the feel of your beard against my skin very much." A shy, knowing little smile followed Bilbo's reassurance as the hobbit lifted his head so that their eyes met, the look in them reminding Thorin yet again that as innocent as his hobbit could seem and be at times, his consort was a very passionate, sensual creature when provoked. And as for his hobbit's fondness for his beard, that he'd figured out fairly easily.

Amused at both thoughts, Thorin skimmed his fingers over the red scratches marking the spot where his consort's neck met shoulder before nuzzling his face there gently this time, not wanting to add to the marks as he simply enjoyed the scent of them on Bilbo's skin, and the way Bilbo's own hand came up to stroke along his jawline.

"I suppose we better be getting up, hadn't we? It must be late, as I feel like I've slept quite a bit even though we were up quite a bit."

Thorin didn't have to look down to know Bilbo was now blushing madly at his poor choice in words, the groan that followed the statement proof the hobbit had realized what he'd just said. Grinning boyishly over that fact Thorin placed a kiss against the skin he'd been enjoying and then
lifted his head as he rolled them over slightly so that his indeed red cheeked halfling was lying on his back while he hovered over him.

"As it happens I don't have to be anywhere but here for the next few hours. I had Balin rearrange my schedule."

"You did?" That he was pleased by the news was written all over the hobbit's face.

"I did. There's food on the dresser for us, so we don't have to join the rest of the family for breakfast either. They'll have to do without us to bother this morning." His nephews weren't completely oblivious to what went on around them, and Thorin thought it best to shield Bilbo from their prying questions and dirty innuendos as long as possible.

"We certainly worked up an appetite." Bilbo agreed with a chuckle, the hobbit trying and failing to finger comb his thoroughly tangled curls into some order. "Though I think it would be best if I washed up first."

"I would imagine we both need it."

Sharing a look Thorin pushed aside the sheets that still covered him and got out of bed with serious regret, wishing they really could just stay there for the rest of the day. But he really was getting hungry now that his thoughts weren't focused solely on Bilbo, and he would imagine that his consort was even hungrier given the superior appetite of hobbits.

And knowing his hobbit well, at least in this, Thorin walked over and picked up the shirt he'd discarded on the floor earlier and walking around brought it over to Bilbo, holding it out to his consort.

"Thank you." Obviously relieved Bilbo took the slightly too big for him garment and hastily donned it, looking absolutely adorable as it settled over his frame before the hobbit pushed aside his own covers and then turned to very carefully use the short set of stairs.

"Sore?"

"Only a little." Bilbo reassured him, coming over to take his hand, giving it a light squeeze. "So what are we having for breakfast?"

Smiling, Thorin squeezed back and then answered the question as they headed towards the bath.
Play Time

Note: The song Bilbo sings is called 'A Step In The Right Direction', and is sung by Angela Lansbury in the Disney movie 'Bed-knobs and Broomsticks'. I recommend both.

Play Time

Bilbo's cheeks were still flushed with color as he knotted the short scarf he'd just tied around his neck some time later. He rarely wore this particular type of accessory, hence the fiddling to get it right, but Thorin had left him no choice in the matter. Or Thorin's beard to be more accurate. Not that he was at all ashamed of the marks his husband's beard had left on his skin, far from it, but he would really rather not have their nephews or anyone else really commenting on them. Hopefully Thorin wouldn't mind him covering them up, especially since the dwarf had seemed oddly pleased once they'd discovered just how thoroughly Thorin had marked his skin during the night. His husband had wanted to help him put lotion on all the marks since he'd made them in the first place, but that had led to more marking and in the end he'd had to shower all over again.

Shaking his head as he recalled how much that had amused Thorin, Bilbo had to smile a little too, the memories reminding him yet again that he was very desirably in his husband's eyes. There was no way the dwarf could have been faking it, since it stood to reason that Thorin wouldn't have woken him up so many times to ravish him all over again if he didn't want to.

He'd been ravished from head to toe, Bilbo thought smugly, and he couldn't wait to do it all over again.

The only downside to the morning was that he was fairly sure that it would be a long while before he'd be able to look at their bathroom and not think about the fact that Thorin had done some of that ravishing while he was up against the tiled wall. Thinking about how he'd had his legs around the dwarf's waist while Thorin had literally held him aloof with an effortlessness that had done things to his insides that Bilbo couldn't begin to put into words. Oh my goodness he couldn't stop thinking about it! He was no lightweight after all, and the way the muscles in Thorin's arms had flexed and bulged...it had been sheer poetry in motion. He'd never been with someone so much stronger than himself, and Bilbo was very glad that he hadn't gone to his grave not knowing what he would have missed out on. And judging from some of the things Thorin had whispered into his ear before leaving him for the day, Thorin had plenty more to teach him when it came to what dwarves got up to when they were feeling amorous.

It made his toes curls just thinking about it.

Deciding that the scarf was as it should be, the hobbit nodded at his reflection in the mirror and then headed out of his bedroom, which he had no intention of using ever again unless he and Thorin were fighting about something. Thorin had made it quite clear they'd be sharing a bed from now on and they were in perfect agreement there. There was, in fact, nowhere he'd rather be.

Heading out his door and greeting his bodyguard for the day, Bilbo thanked him as always and then together they headed down the passageway towards his gardens with Bilbo coming to a surprised halt when one of the servants he saw habitually came out a door with two little ones clinging to her skirts. She looked just as surprised to see him, and not particularly happy about it either given the panicky look that had come over her face.

"Hello, Miri." Giving her a smile meant to reassure, Bilbo asked if the children were hers, smiling at the two warmly even though it was rather strange to look at a little girl who had more hair on her
"Consort." Bobbing her usual curtsy and making her son and daughter similarly acknowledge the presence of the king's consort, Miri confirmed that the two children were hers, and then with much stammering and apologies explained that her mother, who usually looked after them while she was working, had taken a bad fall that morning and there had been no one else available to watch them. She would make sure they didn't get into trouble and they were very well behaved and-

Cutting her off before she upset herself further Bilbo assured her that it was fine. He was sure they wouldn't be a problem and if anyone gave her trouble about it she could tell him or her that she had gotten his permission to bring them to work with her. And actually, he was on his way to his gardens and would she like to leave them with him for a couple hours? Then they really wouldn't get in the way of her chores and he'd appreciate both their company and their help since he had some bushes and trees to plant finally.

"Oh but I couldn't ask you to mind them." The very idea had the woman losing what color she'd gotten back. In truth the strange hobbit was her favorite member of the royal family because he was neat as a pin and never had to be cleaned up after, but it was offers like this that reminded her what peculiar people hobbits were. He was her consort for Mahal's sake. Of course she couldn't let him watch her children!

"Not at all. I miss having children underfoot, really. My cousins' children were always coming to visit my nephew and I, and I've sorely missed the company and someone to tell my stories to. Would you two like to hear about the time I met some trolls?"

Eyes wide at the idea of a hobbit facing off against trolls and living to tell the tale, both children nodded their heads and let go of their mother's skirts to move closer to the odd creature their king had married.

"It's quite the tale really, and if you like I could tell you other stories about your king and the great things he did while he was working to reclaim Erebor with his most faithful of friends." Holding out his hands Bilbo grinned as both children moved in to take them, ignoring their mother's attempts to prevent her ruler's consort from playing minder to her offspring.

"Well that's settled then, I think. If you need them, Miri, we'll be in the garden as I said, or I'll bring them back to you, whichever comes first."

And taking advantage of the fact that she'd apparently been stunned speechless by this turn of events Bilbo herded the little dwarves in the direction of his garden as he began the tale he'd related to Bofur on the way to the Lonely Mountain, his bodyguard their protective shadow.

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Heading up to his chambers to retrieve some paperwork he'd forgotten that Balin needed from him, Thorin eyes narrowed with interest when he saw a woman he didn't recognize talking to the guards who were in charge of making sure that no one got into the royal quarters that didn't have prior permission. He'd had 'talks' with the men charged with that duty after the garden incident and he was fairly confident that he'd gotten it into their thick skulls that he'd gut anyone who was responsible for putting his consort's life in danger by not doing his or her job.

Obviously noting the change in the bearing of the guards the woman turned around to face him, her eyes going wide before she was bowing low to him, apologizing for being in his way as she backed up until her back was pressed up against the wall.
"And what business do you have here?"

She didn't look up as she wrung her hands, her voice just a little shaky as she stated that she'd come to have a word with Miri, one of the servants who tended to the bedrooms and occasionally helped out in the kitchen. After the first assassination attempt he'd looked thoroughly into everyone that came into constant contact with Bilbo, and she'd been vouched for by people he trusted implicitly.

"We sent for Miri, Your Majesty." One of the guards informed him. "She should be on her way."

"I see."

Pausing a moment as he debated pressing the woman further, his gut was saying there was more to this then met the eye, the choice was made for Thorin as the servant in question appeared, walking very quickly towards them and not looking any more pleased than the other woman to see him, though she hid it quickly. And since he knew that women were just as capable of cold blooded murder as any man Thorin did what came natural to him and was blunt in his order.

"One of you two will explain why you're looking so guilty this minute, no lies, or else."

While Miri stared at him in shocked silence the other woman immediately spilled her guts, explaining that she'd come to pick up Miri's children having been sent by her mother, who was friends with Miri's mother. Apparently Miri's mother was worried Miri might lose her job for bringing the children with her to work, which was understandable since it really had been wrong of Miri to do so.

Turning his head Thorin asked the woman if what the other said was true.

"Yes, Your Majesty. My-most of both mine and my husband's families were killed when Smaug took the mountain. My mother is the only one I have that can watch the children, and they're very-your consort said it was all right." She blurted out suddenly, like she'd just remembered that that was important. "The children are with him now, actually, in the garden. He said he missed playing with little ones the way he did back home, and he hasn't brought them back to me so they must not be troubling him. He said if anyone had a problem with it they could talk to him."

Fairly sure that they were being truthful, and that it was talking to him that was making them nervous and out of sorts, Thorin relaxed a little, but decided nonetheless to check out their story, just to be on the safe side. He'd only just made his hobbit his own, he would not lose him without a fight to the death. So he said that the visitor could come through, that they'd all go together to retrieve the children from the gardens as he'd come to pay his consort a visit anyway.

His presence continued to make them nervous, as did his silence most likely, but he preferred them off balance for the moment, and so remained as cool and cold as ice up until they were nearly in front of the currently open doors that led into the gardens, the sound of Bilbo's voice very clear.

That the hobbit was singing was obviously the reason both guards at the doors were struggling not to smile, especially since the song was apparently about a bird that couldn't fly very well, and then a turtle who was inching his way up a hill so slowly he looked like he was standing still. The point of the tune was about the importance of continuing to try and doing your best it seemed, one step at a time. It was silly, and when he got closer the whole thing was that much more ridiculous due to the dirt his consort was currently wearing on his face and clothes, but the equally dirty children liked it, all but bouncing up and down as they asked to hear the song again.

But Bilbo caught sight of them and alerted the two to the fact that their mother was in the doorway, the boy and girl running over to tell her all about how they'd helped the consort plant trees and bushes, learned two new songs, AND had heard lots of really neat stories about their king and
hobbits. Could they go to the Shire and meet more hobbits? And see their little houses and beardless faces?

"Perhaps, someday, but for now you need to thank the consort for watching over you and then go with Lita until I get off of work. Now." Miri added, obviously seeing that the two intended to argue.

So with obvious reluctance the two said goodbye to Bilbo, who hugged them both before sending them off with affectionate pats on the head.

Smiling a little Thorin watched the two women hustle the children out before turning his attention to Bilbo. Pulling out the handkerchief he was constantly told he needed to carry around with him, Thorin used it to wipe away some of the dirt while he asked the hobbit if there was any more work to be done in the garden. He'd see that help was arranged if he needed it.

"No, I'm good. We actually got a lot of work done, and I'm not going to do any more planting until the delegation from the Shire get here. Hamfast said he'd send seedlings with them, so that I can grow plants here that came from my own gardens back in the Shire." Having pulled out his own handkerchief Bilbo worked on his other cheek while asking how bad the damage was.

"I imagine I looked worse after that cave in."

"That's reassuring." A long pause. "And I-I hope that you don't mind that I wore the scarf. To cover the marks. I just-just didn't want Kili or Fili to notice and make a big deal about it."

Fingering the scarf Bilbo was wearing Thorin hooked his finger under the material and used it to pull Bilbo in so that he could steal a long, hard kiss that had the hobbit grabbing onto his upper arms for support. This of course went straight to his ego, and made it that much better.

The fact that his hobbit was looking glassy eyed and deliciously rumpled when he lifted his head to take in the view had Thorin pondering if he had time to drag Bilbo back to their bed before he had to meet up with Balin before his next meeting. Sadly, he did not, but still...

"Keep the scarf on. I'll have use for it tonight."

The puzzled look Bilbo gave him just made Thorin smile that much more.

Rather than drop any hint as to what his busy mind was now imagining and planning Thorin didn't explain, simply stating that unfortunately he had to get back to work, but would see Bilbo at dinner.

"I'll look forward to seeing you."

Amused at the oh so proper tone of voice Thorin gave Bilbo's curls a good tousle and then headed out, well aware that Bilbo's eyes remained on him all the way out of the doors.

It was a damn good day.

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After cleaning up for the third time that day Bilbo headed down to the library so put in some time there, having promised Ori he'd drop by and feeling very energetic after the kiss good bye Thorin had given him in his garden. There was no point in letting that energy go to waste after all, and helping at the library would help him pass the time until dinner. Not that it was food he was looking forward to, which was unusual for him on a number of levels as a hobbit, but he had a feeling he'd get used to it. Plus he was very curious about why Thorin wanted him to keep his scarf on, especially since it wasn't like he would need to steal kisses from him then. Thorin could have all the kisses he
Telling himself that he'd find out soon enough, not to mention he really rather not risk someone reading his face and getting an idea where his thoughts kept drifting off to, Bilbo threw himself into work as soon as he had his latest assignment from Ori. It made him sad, being surrounded by the damaged and neglected tomes, too many of them beyond help so that the best they could do was transfer the knowledge in them to new paper before the content was lost along with its former home.

The irony that he had no idea what he was writing wasn't lost on him, to him he was just drawing symbols on paper and not words that meant anything to him. Naturally he'd point out that this was somewhat dangerous since he could write the wrong word if he made a mistake, but Bilbo figured that so long as he double checked with Ori when he wasn't sure about something it wouldn't end too badly. Though he felt sorry for the authors of the books he was translating, since if there were mistakes they'd be blamed instead of him.

Dipping his quill into the ink again Bilbo started on the next word, barely started before he felt familiar eyes on him. Knowing those eyes and what they meant Bilbo bit back a sigh and carefully finished what he was doing before returning the quill to its holder before looking up to meet Nori's gaze. "Hello, Nori."

"A pleasure, as always, Consort."

Studying the older dwarf's face Bilbo held in another sigh because yes, there was that gleam in Nori's eyes again that spelled nothing but trouble for him. The dwarf had removed something from his person again without him noticing.

It was a game the dwarf liked to play with people, and Ori's brother apparently liked him enough to include him in his pocket picking. Nori always gave the item he'd taken back, often times without the person realizing the item had been liberated in the first place, so Bilbo expected that he would simply find his pocket watch in the wrong pocket again, or his handkerchief in it's proper place but folded up into an animal or flower of some sort.

Checking his pockets in turn Bilbo wasn't sure what to make of the fact that everything appeared to be in its place with no mischief done. So obviously he was missing something here. That worried him enough that Bilbo actually reached up to check his beads, even though those were supposed to be off limits given the importance dwarves put on them. But no, they were all there too, and he could tell by feel that they were in the right order.

In response to the look he was getting the dwarf smiled a little and then Nori lifted his hand out from under the table to wave the scarf that had been wrapped around Bilbo's neck moments before in the air.
"You! You took that-I didn't give it back!" Cheeks going red Bilbo automatically slapped a hand over the largest of the beard burns he'd sought to hide, sputtering all the more when Nori grinned at him widely, obviously enjoying his reaction. By being friends with Ori he'd been deemed in the same category as the man's little brother as opposed to consort which meant that Nori spoke his title respectively, but otherwise treated him like a kid brother who was his to tease as of late.

From his place a short distance away Bilbo's guard frowned, not at all pleased that he'd missed the scarf's removal when the infamous thief had helped himself to the consort's scarf while walking around him before taking his current seat. He and the other guards really did need to be more vigilant when this particular dwarf was around.

Ignoring the glare he was getting from the bodyguard Nori simple kept his grip on the scarf. "Bout time he marked you good and proper. We were starting to worry." Still grinning Nori tossed the strip of material across the table, Bilbo snatching it up with his free hand.

"Our-what happens-what goes on between Thorin and I is none of your concern!" In some corner of his brain Bilbo was utterly mortified that his words were deserting him when he needed them so desperately, but for the moment the hobbit was too busy being peeved while he quickly retied his scarf around his neck even though it was pointless given the eyeful Nori had gotten already.

"Ah, but there you're wrong, Consort. Thorin is both our king and our friend, and anything to do with his happiness is of concern to us. It's good that he's doing more than stroking your honey curls all the time."

Going red as a tomato Bilbo didn't know what upset him more about the way this conversation was going. That Nori was making these comments about his and Thorin's personal relations, or the curls stroking observation. He loved when Thorin stroked his head, he didn't want to get so flustered whenever Thorin did it that his husband stopped. Which he would, if people kept commenting on it.

"You know plenty of gold has changed hands since you came to the mountain, people betting on whether you'd stay or not and whether you'd be a true consort to Thorin or just a hobbit with a title he did nothing to earn." Waving a hand in the face of more stuttering, Nori would have patted Bilbo's shoulder if the table between them hadn't been too big for that. "Relax, Lad, people are coming over to your side slowly but surely. You're a strange creature, and some of the things you do don't make a lick of sense to anyone, but it's obvious you're good for the king and that you want to help us even though we aren't your people and we probably don't make a lot of sense to you at times." The fact that the little hobbit was oddly cute and tended to bring out a person's protective instincts helped as well, but Nori didn't want about to tell the wee thing he thought him appealing in any way least his consort or anyone eavesdropping get the wrong idea. He liked his head on his neck, thank you very much, and Thorin was as possessive of the hobbit as he was of the mountain.

"Really? You aren't just saying that?" Fiddling with the ends of his scarf Bilbo tried not to look too hopeful, not wanting it to be really obvious how much he cared about this.

The dwarf smirked at him. "I leave the reassuring to Ori."

"That would be for the best, yes." It was wrong of him to think it, but it really was hard to take a man with such a bizarre hairstyle seriously, Bilbo thought to himself, shaking his head over the fact that
he’d been foolish enough to ask for the reassurance in the first place.

"Nori." There was as much warning in Ori’s tone of voice as there ever was as the young dwarf came walking towards them to interrupt his brother’s fun. "Are you bothering our consort again? What did you take this time without asking? I’ve told you not to do that!"

Grinning in response to his little brother’s hands on his hips scowling, Ori was just the cutest thing ever, Nori assured his brother that he was behaving, though the look he got in response said Ori wasn’t taking his word for it, which just proved how well his younger brother knew him.

"I’m terribly sorry he’s bugging you again." Ori gave Bilbo his most apologetic look. He really liked their new consort very much, and having been teased and tormented by Nori all his life he had nothing but sympathy for anyone his brother took a liking to. The more Nori liked you the more likely he was to drive you batty. And while any sane dwarf would know better then to harass the husband of their king, Nori had obviously bashed his head in the mine shafts one too many times when he was a wee dwarrow.

"It’s quite all right. I’ve gotten used to it."

Understanding Bilbo’s resignation completely, he and Dori had been trying to civilize their middle brother for years, Ori gave him a look of commiseration before narrowing his eyes in Nori’s direction. "And you, you should mind your manners around the consort, if for no other reason than someone might misunderstand if they catch sight of your hands on the consort. You wouldn’t find your little game so amusing then, when Thorin comes for you with the intention of beating you silly."

"Oh dear...he’d crush you like a bug." Bilbo gave Nori a horrified look, distressed on his behalf since he knew Nori couldn’t help himself when it came to his sticky fingers.

Meanwhile Nori’s ego was absorbing the back to back blows of their certainly that Thorin would trounce him completely. Obviously their consort had never seen him in a fight before, but Ori was his brother for Mahal’s sake. Where was the family loyalty? The defense of their name if nothing else! What had become of brotherly loyalty? The bonds of blood? Little brothers were supposed to idolize their big brothers, not besmirch them!

Both Bilbo and Ori had to struggle to keep a straight face when Nori started muttering his thoughts under his breath, having taken exception to their words apparently. But neither was about to take back what they’d said and insinuated either.

For his part Bilbo’s bodyguard struggled and somewhat failed to hold in a snicker. The dwarf’s expression was just priceless. He couldn’t help it.

"There, there, Master Nori, there’s no need to be so cross." Feeling sorry for the dwarf after a while Bilbo got up on his knees on the chair so that he could reach over and pat Nori’s hand sympathetically. "I’m sure you’re very good in a battle too, and Ori and I like you very much most of the time. It’s not your fault that you’re not as big and strong as Thorin, you were just born that way. I wouldn’t stand a chance against him either."

Logically Nori knew Bilbo was trying to comfort him, but still...ow.

Struggling not to laugh out loud for his brother’s sake Ori moved over to give Nori’s shoulder a comforting pat too.

"I’m going to go see what Dori’s doing."
Saying their goodbyes Bilbo and Ori watched Nori very quickly disappear from sight behind some bookshelves, waiting a few moments after that before they looked at each other, unable not to giggle a little over the faces Nori had made at them before he'd left their sight completely. Too funny for words.

Glaring at the door in front of him, he was offended by its refusal to open and let them into the currently sealed up room, Thorin absentmindedly tapped his fingers against his side while they waited for Fili to hunt down Nori and bring him back here to deal with the locks. They'd called in three smiths already to try and work the complicated set of locks open, but it wasn't just a matter of the locks being tricky to begin with, the assault on the mountain and the decades of neglect afterwards had all taken its toll as well. On top of that he had no idea what was in the room, the contents apparently valuable enough that the group of tradesmen with claim over it were willing to let construction on their workplace be delayed if they got access to the room now. And while normally he wouldn't have come all the way out here to see a simple door being unlocked, news of how difficult a task this was proving to be had aroused his curiosity.

Thankfully his day had started out spectacularly well, Thorin quietly mused, so the wait didn't bother him nearly as much as his growing curiosity to find out what lay waiting for them. It would be quite amusing if there was actually nothing of value inside, especially after the way the tradesmen had been hounding him about it.

It would appear that he was having a much better day than Nori too, Thorin's eyebrows rising a little in reaction to the scowl on the other dwarf's face when his friend arrived on the scene with his lock-picking tools and a smirking Fili. Nori wasn't the most cheerful of person, true, but it was rare to see him scowling and muttering to himself this way, especially when there was a difficult lock for him to play with.

"And what has you in such a foul mood?"

Rather than answer Nori glared at him, which had a couple of the men standing by to get inside the door to remind the dwarf to show more respect for their king.

"He has earned the right to show less respect. I'll tell him when he's crossed the line." Thorin's tone warned of dire consequences if someone other than him decided to punish Nori for his attitude.

"Uncle Bilbo and Ori got his tail in a knot." Fili informed his uncle, having moved to stand by Thorin's side. He grinned as he said it, ignoring the dark look Nori aimed in his direction.

"Apparently Nori was up to his usual tricks, helping himself to the scarf Uncle Bilbo had around his neck, and ended up being scolded thoroughly on top of Uncle Bilbo telling Nori he should be careful seeing as you're so much bigger and stronger than Nori is."

"And my own brother agreed with him." Nori muttered, joining the conversation as he started in on the first lock, not even the challenge enough to break through his foul mood. "And him being a hobbit, saying how I shouldn't feel bad since he wouldn't stand a chance either, like there's hardly any difference between us. Oh but I should have boxed both their ears."

Very aware of just how sensitive his consort's ears were, Thorin's voice held more than a hint of threat as he stated that Bilbo's ears were not to be touched if Nori wished to keep his own ears attached to his head. All the braids in the world wouldn't make up for that lack.

"Here I thought it was his neck you're overly fond of."
Eyes narrowing at that very pointed reference to the marks Nori must have seen when he'd stole the scarf right off Bilbo's neck, Thorin found himself torn between being annoyed at the teasing and anger at the thought that Nori was putting his hands on his hobbit. Yes he knew that Nori would cut his hands off before he'd touch Bilbo inappropriately, and that Bilbo would never allow it either, but he found himself being reduced to the mindset of a boy when it came to his hobbit at the moment. Getting his consort naked and back in bed with him had been front and center of his mind for the majority of the day.

He'd never really had the time or felt enough for someone to be stupid over them, apparently he was making up for missing out on that now.

For the sake of their sanities and his own temper Thorin didn't comment further on the blow his consort had apparently given Nori's ego, instead changing the flow of conversation to more neutral topics that worked up until the point when the sound of footsteps reached their ears, making the members of the royal family and Nori reach for their weapons of choice. There was no reason for anyone to be wandering around in this part of the mountain yet, and after the two attempts on Bilbo's life none of them were about to risk being caught off guard if their unknown assassins decided that Thorin needed to be eliminated as well.

But the four figures that appeared down the hallway were Bilbo, Ori, Bifur, and the guard assigned to protect the former, none of them looking the worse for wear though Thorin's consort and Nori's brother weren't looking particularly happy or cheerful, which was somewhat unusual for both of them.

Leaving the others to see what was going on Thorin walked over to meet them, stopping in front of his consort with a questioning look on his face. "What brings you three here?" What went unsaid was the fact that they had no business being in this area and had better have a good reason to have come, especially given the likelihood that there were still people looking to kill his consort as soon as an opportunity presented itself.

"We came to apologize to Nori for hurting his feelings." Was Bilbo's explanation, a guilty look on the hobbit's face. "Bifur said he was really upset. Or Ori said that that was what he said."

Looking over in Bifur's direction Thorin listened as the dwarf, who only spoke their native tongue, explained that he'd been drinking with Nori when Fili had come looking for the other dwarf, and that shortly after the two had left Bilbo and Ori had shown up with the guard looking for Nori, to apologize for earlier. He'd thought it wise to come along since this area was supposed to be deserted and the consort couldn't be talked out of his and Ori's mission.

Agreeing with Bifur's decision to come with the others Thorin nodded and then pointed out to the other two that they could have waited for them at the entrance to this part of the mountain instead of coming all this way, Thorin not really surprised when they gave him even more guilty, sorry expressions that naturally made him feel for them whether he wanted to or not.

Unable to scold them, particularly since Nori would take offence to his brother being scolded, especially publicly, and Bilbo...well he didn't stand a chance against those big eyes he was getting, all pleading and sorry. At least not in this instance, Thorin making a mental note to try and build up an immunity to that look if possible since his consort seemed to find trouble relatively easily.

"You can apologize to him and then you will remain here until I can see you safely back to the main part of the mountain myself."

Bilbo and Ori nodded in perfect synchronization.
Turning around and then motioning them to follow after him Thorin led the way to where Nori was once again working on the locks, the dwarf doing his best to give every appearance that he wasn't even aware they had visitors, since normally Nori would have been scolded Ori quite thoroughly at this point for being in a place he had no business being in. To give his friend a moment to get his temper better under control Thorin took the time to introduce his consort to the others before addressing the still quiet lock picker.

"Nori, you have visitors."

"I'm working, I'll talk to them later."

Knowing his brother, as well as wanting to act as a shield between Nori's temper and their consort's tender feelings, Ori bravely moved forward and carefully set a hand on his brother's shoulder. "Nori...we came to tell you that we're sorry for what we said before. You're one of the strongest, most bravest dwarves either of has ever known."

"Yes. You took back the mountain with Thorin, when hundreds of other dwarves were too afraid of the dragon to even step foot near Erebor." Moving in to stand beside Ori Bilbo's voice was earnest, though he kept his hands to himself since he wasn't anticipating a warm reception. "And truly I don't mind when you play with my things, I know you generally only do it to people you like, or at least when you give whatever you took back. And you're the best at what you do, picking locks and such. Everyone in the Erebor knows it."

Leaving his lock picking tools in the lock Nori looked over at them, intending to tell them off for so obviously sucking up to him, and found himself utterly captured by his brother's big eyes, and then he noticed his consort's eyes too and he was hooked. He couldn't look away, and he found himself telling them that they had no reason to worry, he was just fine. Nori even smiled at them against his will, which had them beaming back at him and sealing his fate.

He just couldn't stay mad at them.

Embarrassed by that fact, they had an audience after all and Fili would doubtlessly retell this to Kili who would blab it to everyone in their former company, Nori decided it would be for the best if he turned his attention back to what he was doing, Bilbo and Ori embarrassing him more by basically cheering him on while the others enjoyed his discomfort.

Nori was never so grateful to hear the locks all give away finally, quickly straightening up and opening the door so that everyone's attention would go to what was inside instead of him.

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While the dwarves he'd been introduced to hurried into the room Nori had just opened up Bilbo asked what was so important about the space they'd entered so quickly, surprised when Thorin explained that as far as he knew the room had no real significance, except to the men who'd just entered it. It didn't make sense to him that this had been given priority when there was nothing valuable inside, but he supposed that that was why Thorin was there in the first place. Just in case there really was something important behind the door and the other dwarves were trying to hide it from the others for some reason. That probably wasn't the case but-

The sound of great grief and loss, chilling in its pain and heartache, cut through all their thoughts like a knife so that they all gathered in the doorway of the room to see what was going on, staying there as they stared at the dwarf who had fallen to his knees in the middle of the room. He was obviously clutching something against his chest, but didn't appear injured in any way.
To Bilbo's searching eyes the others looked fine, though sad as well but what-oh.

Understanding dawning Bilbo didn't think, he simply reacted, hurrying over to the now silent dwarf and placing an arm around the man's shoulder, pulling him up against his side in a show of support and comfort. He could see what the dwarf held in his hands now, and to him it looked like a very worn work apron made of leather with tools still poking out of some of the pockets, but Bilbo didn't doubt that it had once belonged to someone very important to this dwarf.

Too lost in the past to realize what he was doing the dwarf leaned against the hobbit, taking comfort from the hand that lifted up to stroke his head, a voice low and soothing calming the raging storm inside of him.

And all around them the dwarves watched, and were glad that this hobbit had come to Erebor.
Stories to Tell

Stories To Tell

As it turned out the dwarves who had requested the room be opened had different reasons for wanting access to it. One of the dwarves had been in a hurry because there were, as hoped, several intact crates piled up against one wall that had safely protected the merchandise inside them that could now be sold, the proceeds used to better their families' current lots. Another had been thinking of both that and the tools of their trade that had been handed down through their families for generations. The ones they'd made for themselves while trying to eke out lives away from the mountain were decent, but not the works of art that had been forged by expert craftsmen and had aged with time to perfection. As for the one who'd fallen to his knees on the floor, whose name was Roma, he'd simply wanted this piece of his childhood to still be standing. His family home had been demolished, the treasures and everyday pieces of that former life lost forever, but this, his father's former workshop, held memories he could touch and hold onto. That connected him to those he'd lost so long ago and never gotten a chance to say goodbye to.

One of the dwarves named Doli tried to help so to speak by giving the younger dwarf's shoulder a hard squeeze before telling him to basically get ahold of himself. What would his lost family think of him, going to pieces so, especially in front of their king and the consort.

"They should consider themselves very fortunate to be still loved so much." Bilbo didn't put any censor in his voice, he'd already figured out that dwarves weren't big on talking about their feelings, but he wasn't about to keep quiet either. "There's nothing wrong with showing love, and Thorin and I aren't the least bit upset about it, are we, Thorin."

Bilbo gave his husband a look that silently communicated that there would be no scarf or ravishing later if he was contradicted.

Getting the message Thorin didn't acknowledged that fact as he took the steps necessary to stand in front of the dwarf who had obviously only just realized that he'd been petted and touched by the royal consort while in the company of his king. The growing fear and horror of possible retribution was wiping the sorrow from the dwarf's face rather quickly now.

Holding up a hand in a gesture of reassurance Thorin let his own eyes and body language convey his lack of anger as he spoke. "There is no one from this mountain who has not felt as you feel now. All that we can do to honor those who did not live to return to the mountain is make it greater than it was in the days of my ancestors passed. I look forward to seeing what you will build with the skills and tools your own ancestors have given you."

Everyone in the room knew that sentiment, even Bilbo, who had never had his home taken from him but had lost both his parents and knew what it was to feel alone and to need things around him to connect him to those he'd lost. He could see in the eyes of all the dwarves in the room that they were remembering, both what had been and the lives they'd led away from their beloved mountain.

"Thank you, your majesty." Bowing his head Roma even managed a small smile when he looked up again, though he was obviously still uneasy about being so close to both members of the royal family.

Picking up on that right away Bilbo asked for a tour of the simple workshop, listening intently even though the hobbit didn't have any interest in metal working and didn't understand more than a quarter of what was being explained to him. And when something new would catch the dwarf's eye and
make his voice and attention falter it would be Bilbo's turn to talk, telling the dwarf and the others about his own home and parents.

Though they all pretended to be studying the workshop as well the dwarves in the room all listened with interest, smiling inside over stories of the consort's mother bashing his father in the head with a frying pan for smoking a particularly off putting mixture of herbs in his pipe indoors in reaction to Roma finding one of his father's own pipes lying abandoned on a worktable. After that was the story of how Bilbo's favourite hiding place when he was a hobbitling was a particularly ugly vase his mother had kept stashed away in a closet, after Roma pointed to a rather bad painting that had been done by his paternal grandmother and had been stashed up here so that it wasn't in the house.

The sharing of stories went on and on until Roma's smile was natural and the dwarf had even laughed at one particular story involving Bilbo, a runaway piglet, and a mud puddle. Seeing that his work was done for the moment, and figuring that he was probably getting in the way of all the other things everyone else wanted to be doing, Bilbo announced that sadly he should be on his way, but that he too looked forward to seeing what the dwarves would make in the future.

"It will be our honor, Consort."

The other two dwarves echoing Roma's bow and sentiment, Bilbo smiled back at them and thanked them for the tour before walking over to link his arm through Thorin's, the king also getting a bow and much thanks for opening the door for them before the royal family and their entourage headed out to leave the workmen to their work room and the memories it held.

In the spirit of appreciating one's family Bilbo linked arms with a surprised Fili as they walked down the hallway, while Ori did the same with Nori, who as always couldn't tell his baby brother no and was maybe feeling a little...family love at the moment.

"Thorin?"

"Yes?"

"What exactly is it that they'll be making in that workshop?"

Chuckling, he couldn't help it, Thorin gave Bilbo a little smile and then started to explain what type of metal working the dwarves would be doing in the future. He wasn't sure the hobbit was getting it any better the second time around, but he figured he could show his halfling some examples when they dropping him and Ori back off at the library.

) Looking over the odd metal sculpture he hadn't even known was in the library, Bilbo tried to figure out what it was supposed to depict and hadn't a single clue. But it must have great meaning to the dwarves, the Halfling reasoned, since they surely wouldn't put it in a place of learning if it wasn't important in some way. And since he didn't want to offend Thorin Bilbo did his best to seem impressed and interested while mentally shaking his head over the waste of time and effort that had to have gone into making the strange thing. But at least he had some idea what the tools he'd been shown in the shop were for, now that he saw how the metal had been manipulated. Or thought he understood...hopefully he'd never have to prove his possible knowledge in the future.

Smiling when Thorin's arms wrapped around his waist, a very welcome distraction, that, Bilbo leaned back against the dwarf's solid frame, glad when that made Thorin cuddle him even closer.

"You know, earlier reminded me of when I was just a hobbitling and my mother would take me with
her to the blacksmith's. He used to show me the tools and try and explain their uses to me too. I was usually more interested in the way the metals glowed in the fire though."

"Your father didn't take you?"

"No." Bilbo laughed. "My father was never that good at haggling, far too polite and well mannered according to my mother. So when it came to dealing with the tougher shopkeepers she usually took over there. Tooks love to get the best deal they can, and woe to anyone who tries to overcharge them. Part of the reason I didn't pay enough attention to the smith's explanations was probably because I was too busy marvelling at the way she'd play him like a flute, come to that."

"I think I would have liked your mother."

"She'd have liked you too."

Making a wry sound Thorin pointed out that it was doubtful she would have been thrilled to have her only child move away to a mountain full of people she didn't know. From the sounds of it the two had been very close.

"Well you wouldn't have had to marry me if she'd been alive." Bilbo pointed out with a smile, shaking his head at the mere thought of what it would have been like. "If she'd been alive, oh but she would have torn into our Thain like a force of nature. She would have never have let him take advantage of your gold sickness and he would have caved, you know, he was actually a little scared of her. He once saw her come after my father when he forgot her birthday…it was the talk of the Shire for years."

"Then that would have been my loss."

Beaming, Bilbo turned in Thorin's arms to smile up at him. "Thank you."

Exchanging a slow, lingering kiss, they were both smiling when they pulled away, Thorin's hands still under Bilbo's shirt at the small of his back. And it was the fingers gently brushing against his skin that had Bilbo asking a question that was sort of related to something he'd asked Thorin the night before, but figured he'd ask again anyway since they weren't naked at the moment. "It really doesn't bother you, that I'm not built like a dwarf? I mean I know you said it doesn't, but it's…I mean what are the odds that we would both prefer someone who was so different from the sort of males we grew up surrounded by."

What went unsaid was the fact that he was actually starting to feel a little self-conscious about his tummy. By hobbit standards he would be considered too thin, but he'd spent enough time around dwarves now to know that by their standards he was definitely…rounder than most of them were. Bombur was a great deal bigger than him, yes, but most dwarves were hard bodied, even the women. There certainly wasn't an ounce of fat on Thorin's body, he'd looked.

"I would have thought I made my enjoyment of your body clear last night." Thorin didn't sound angry, in fact that gleam in his eyes suggested the exact opposite. "But it will be my pleasure to remind you as many times as needed tonight."

"Is that so?"

Making a sound of agreement Thorin kept Bilbo in his arms as he backed up and then took a seat on a chair, Bilbo letting himself be manhandled into sitting on Thorin's lap even though the thought that he was, in public, was terribly embarrassing and not at all hobbit like. But Thorin was being very nice and affectionate with him, and he did like that an awful, awful lot. So he only squirmed a little,
because he just couldn't stay still no matter how hard he tried.

That he was rewarded by the feel of Thorin's manhood twitching in response to his squirming had Bilbo's ears burning a little, his eyes dropping down to stare at his lap where he'd laced his fingers together nervously.

"I think, Consort, that I know an excellent way to show you how much I enjoy your curves."

Cocking his head to one side Bilbo's curiosity got the best of him. "Oh?"

"Yes." Lowering his head Thorin gave one of Bilbo's ears a nip just to make him squirm a little bit more. "But for now I have to get back to work before Balin or one of his minions comes to interrupt us. Only I get to see you like this."

Loving the possessiveness of Thorin's tone, but also really, really not wanting to be caught sitting on Thorin's lap by someone, particularly Dwalin, Bilbo opted to get off his husband's thighs. Because Balin did tend to send his brother to find their king, Bilbo thought with a grimace, which made sense because Dwalin would be number one on his list if he were making one of dwarves he wouldn't want to argue with. Aside from the dwarves who might still want to kill him, Bilbo amended, and possibly Dis.

Getting to his feet Thorin stroked a hand through Bilbo's curls and then said he'd see him at supper. Agreeing with that Bilbo said goodbye and then turned to watch Thorin go until he was out of sight, allowing himself to sigh a little before taking the seat Thorn had just vacated. He'd never expected to be in this situation, to feel like this again, he should really be too old for it come to that. Not that he hadn't already been feeling a lot of this since the first time he'd laid eyes on Thorin, Bilbo mused, but back then he'd kept it mostly bottled up and to himself because showing it would have brought him nothing but trouble. But now he knew it wouldn't bring trouble and that his feelings wouldn't be rejected and that-

"Oh. Oh dear."

What if what he was feeling…what if his feelings only got stronger the longer he and Thorin were together? What if he, what if he fell in love with Thorin? What would Thorin think if that happened? What would happen to him if that happened? He'd long ago decided that it wouldn't ever happen to him again after things had gone so horribly wrong with Haymitch, and what would he do if Thorin ended up rejecting him too?

But no, Bilbo told himself sternly, refusing to think so darkly. Perhaps Thorin would never care for him as much as he might come to care for the dwarf, but he knew that Thorin did care about him. Not to mention the fact that it wasn't like the dwarf could marry someone else either, they were already married. To each other. And ideally a married couple was supposed to love each other so it would not only be a good thing if he were to fall in love with Thorin, but really what he should want to happen. And want Thorin to feel for him in return. If that was possible.

Was it possible?

Hearing his name being called Bilbo called back to Ori that he was coming and then got to his feet, shaking off his concerns for the moment. What was important was that he and Thorin had cleared up the misunderstandings about wanting to share a bed, and that they cared about each other.

Yes, the important thing was that Thorin had plans for tonight that he had a feeling he was really going to enjoy.
A big smile returning to his face Bilbo was all cheer by the time he found Ori among the bookshelves, ready to help his friend with whatever new chore there was because the faster his day went, the sooner night would come.

A number of hours later Bilbo made a happy sound while nuzzling his cheek against Thorin's broad chest, thinking to himself that he really was going to have to buy some more scarves at the first opportunity. They were definitely going to become a part of his regular wardrobe, especially since Thorin liked them so much. And his neck needed them too, that particularly part of his body was going to have to be covered again tomorrow thanks to Thorin's beard again. Not that he was complaining in the slightest about that. Oh no, the hobbit thought with an inner purr, quite the opposite. And he especially liked the dwarf's idea of how to reassure him that he didn't think he was fat or unappealing even though he didn't look like a dwarf. Admittedly he'd been a bit taken aback when Thorin had rolled them over so that he was on top, but once Thorin had placed his hands under his thighs to help guide him into exactly how to move to 'ride' him, he'd very quickly become fond of being intimate that way. And the way Thorin had looked at his body, which had been completely on display for his husband in the position he'd been in…well to say he hadn't lasted very long would be entirely accurate.

"Riding you is much better than riding a pony."

Bilbo went bright red as he realized that he'd said that out loud, the rumbling in Thorin's chest making it clear that his husband had heard him as well. And then Thorin was laughing loud enough that the hallway guards might be able to hear him.

Forgetting all about being embarrassed now, Bilbo found the energy to shift up onto his elbows to take in the mirth etched all over Thorin's face, taking decades off of it so that the dwarf almost looked as young as his nephews. Smiling in response, how could he not, Bilbo absolutely meant to say it when he told Thorin that he loved to see him laugh.

"You have that effect on me, it seems." Thorin lifted a hand to card his fingers through Bilbo's curls. "You're good for me, Little One."

Pleased when Thorin drew his head down for a kiss, Bilbo savored the lazy kisses before drawing his head back to smile at Thorin again. "Well taking care of you is my job now."

"Your job, is it?" Thorin's free hand patted the hobbit's behind. "A most taxing one, I'd imagine."

"Very, very taxing indeed." Bilbo agreed, grinning like he was a young man again too. "But well worth the time and effort."

That called for some busy hands and even busier mouths, though they were both too spent from their recent lovemaking to do much more than remind the other of the pleasure they could give and receive even before the most intimate of joinings.

They were happy.
Keeping Ones Promises

Walking into his bedroom the night before the delegation from the Shire was due to arrive Thorin wasn't surprised to see his sexy little consort already in his bed wearing one of his shirts, Bilbo having gotten the habit of doing that until he stripped him of the offending garment. What did surprise him was that there were clothes draped over one of the chairs near his bed, both Bilbo's and his own. He hadn't put them there, and while it wasn't unusual for his clothes to be picked out for him by the people in charge of such things for a special occasion Thorin couldn't imagine that they'd see the Shire delegation as such. The clothes set out for him weren't overly fancy either, nor was there any jewellery set out which was the standard practice thus far. The hobbit's clothes were his regular attire, but then the official meeting with the Shire delegation wasn't until later in the day and Bilbo tended to put off wearing fancy clothes as long as possible, he'd learned.

Smiling at him Bilbo pointed to the clothes. "I was hoping you'd wear those tomorrow, if it's alright."

"If it pleases you." He wasn't the sort who ever cared what he was wearing so long as it was serviceable and didn't constrict him overly, and aside from that it pleased him, that Bilbo would go to the trouble of picking out the articles of clothing.

Stripping down to his skin, he had no interest in wearing anything when he had his consort to keep him warm, Thorin walked over to the bed and slid under the covers. Accepting the kiss Bilbo gave him in greeting Thorin slid his fingers through Bilbo's curls as he returned the gesture.

"So your meeting ran late?"

Saying a few swear words in his native language under his breath, Thorin nodded his head. "They all seem to."

"Well now you can get some rest." Moving away a little Bilbo snuggled under the covers and smiled at Thorin expectantly.

Settling in beside the halfling Thorin reached out and drew him against his chest, wrapping his arms around his hobbit as he nuzzled his face against Bilbo's neck. And sliding a hand under the shirt his lover was still wearing Thorin stroked his fingers up and down Bilbo's spine, surprised when the hobbit patted a hand against his chest and told him not tonight. They needed to get some sleep.

"Tired?"

"A little. Balin said you have a very early meeting tomorrow, and that I should make sure you got a lot of sleep so that you wouldn't be in a bad mood for it. I promised him."

Bilbo's voice and tone were slightly muffled given the position they were in but Thorin still heard enough that his curiosity and instincts were aroused. So drawing back a little and tilting Bilbo's chin up with his fingers to get a better look at his face, Thorin took one look at the redness of his consort's ears and cheeks and got a very good idea of how that earlier conversation had gone.

Thorin could only imagine how uncomfortable Balin had been essentially telling Bilbo not to be intimate with his king so that he'd sleep more, but he was highly amused by the thoughts alone. He was rather sorry he hadn't been around to see it, though then again he might have gotten drawn into the conversation and that would have severely cut back on the amusement of the situation.
A poke in his chest drew Thorin's attention back to Bilbo, the hobbit's cheeks puffed up a little in indignation.

"Stop grinning like that, it wasn't funny. It was mortifying."

"You have me curious, exactly how did he phrase the request?"

"He...he said that you've been very tired at your morning meetings...that you start to nod off and that he'd very much appreciate it if I could try and see to it that you got a proper amount of sleep at night. The...uhm...why he thought I was responsible for you not getting enough sleep was implied."

Still terribly amused Thorin rolled them over so that he was lying on top of his halfling, grinning down at his flushed and flustered man. "One would think he'd realize that it's the meetings themselves that make me tired and long for oblivion. Not that you haven't played your part as well."

Bilbo read the look in Thorin's eyes easily, frowning in response. "Thorin...I gave him my word."

Unexpectedly stirred up by his halfling's use of his 'stern parent' tone, he'd heard Bilbo use it on Fili and Kili a couple of times with surprising success, Thorin's interest in making Bilbo break his promise increasing quite a bit so that rather than continue to tease his hobbit he lowered his head to give his lover's mouth something else to do but lecture him.

And it worked for a little bit, but far too soon Bilbo moved his head so that his now thoroughly kissed lips were no longer pressed against Thorin's as the hobbit again stated that he'd given his word so Thorin was just going to have to control himself.

"I have excellent control." Moving his head this time Thorin nibbled on the tip of Bilbo's ear, the hobbit shuddering beneath him in reaction.

"Thorin...."

"Yes, Consort?"

"There is...plenty of time...Thorin." Groaning in reaction to the way Thorin was deliberately dragging their erections together, Bilbo suggested that they simply make plans to do this tomorrow. When the dwarf didn't have an early meeting and they could...take their time with this.

"No time like the present."

"Worried that you're getting too old?" The hobbit shot back, his tone implying that Thorin felt they should be intimate now because soon the dwarf wouldn't be up to it soon enough.

Mouth dropping open Thorin stared down at his very perturbed halfling, who apparently didn't appreciate the fact that he was being seduced and had decided to hit where it would hurt. He wouldn't have thought it of his adorably prim hobbit, but he could see that Bilbo had done it deliberately.

Bilbo's voice was also defensive as he pointed out that Thorin was quite a bit older than him.

"I'll show you how OLD I am."

"BUT I PROMISED!"

Thorin was fairly sure that he could make Bilbo forget all about the promise he'd given Balin, but to save time and prevent the hobbit from wallowing in guilt later the dwarf opted to cut to the chase.
"You promised that I'd be rested and alert for the meeting tomorrow and I will be."

Opening his mouth Bilbo saw the loophole, a mental struggle taking place across his face before the hobbit reached out to place his hands on either side of Thorin's face, bringing it down so that they could lock lips again.

Both hoped they could say Bilbo kept his word come morning.

)Wiping his hands on his apron Bilbo couldn't be more pleased with the efforts of his and the other dwarves labors. Not that his help had been particularly wanted, the dwarves had thought they were more than capable of putting some food together for a group of hobbits without his input and had been rather stubborn about it. When he'd pointed out that none of them had ever cooked for a hobbit before save for the royals' personal cooks no one had been particularly worried, but Bilbo had followed that point with the one where it was a matter of pride that the Shire delegation leave the mountain with positive things to say about their stay. Did the dwarves really want the hobbits to return home and spread the word that the people of Erebor weren't capable of being good hosts? That Men and Elves were better than them?

That had done the trick.

Eventually the cooks had been willing to take his suggestions for menu into consideration, getting them to let him actually help and supervise had taken more work, especially since Thorin had pointed out that the kitchens was no place for a consort either. But he'd managed to convince them and Bilbo was convinced that even though they'd never say so the dwarves would soon realize how right he'd been.

And sure that everything was in order now, the other cooks would have to deliberately mess the food up at this point and their pride was on the line, Bilbo thanks them all for their hard work and wished them a good day before heading out with his guard to get changed.

"Back to your rooms, Consort?"

"Yes, thank you." Smiling at his favorite guard, Awl actually talked to him and never made what were probably uncomplimentary observations about him in a language he didn't yet understand, Bilbo was always glad when he was assigned this guard. Not that he got the sense that Awl liked him or anything, but the dwarf didn't seem to mind babysitting him which was more than Bilbo could say about many of the others.

So off the went together, and as per usual they didn't say much as they walked with fate deciding to inject some life into the walk by way of Fili appearing around a corner and deciding that rather than continue on his way to wherever he'd been going he would walk with his uncle instead.

Pleased to have the company Bilbo linked his arm through Fili and asked his nephew what he'd been up to.

"Mostly I've been acting as an alarm for Uncle Thorin all morning. I'm exhausted and I didn't even have to participate in the meetings except for making sure that Uncle stayed awake and involved in what was being said."

"You were what?"

Fili shrugged his shoulders, understanding Bilbo's confusion perfectly. "He woke me up early this morning and said I had to come with him to all his meetings. That I was to listen and make sure that
he didn't nod off no matter how boring the topic was. Which is strange since normally he does make an effort to appear aware of what's going on even when he is bored out of his mind, but today he seemed unusually determined even though the meetings weren't of any great importance as far as I could tell."

Embarrassed but also really touched that Thorin had gone to all that trouble for him, Bilbo smiled and gave Fili a sympathetic look since he knew how trying those meetings apparently were since they always left Thorin so worn out and often irritable. "Well I'm sure he appreciated your help."

"He was in a surprisingly good mood this morning." Fili agreed before changing the subject. "So will there be anyone younger in this delegation from the Shire or will it all be older hobbits?"

Mind jumping to the most logical reason Fili would be asking that, the dwarf and his brother had been quite intrigued when informed that they would be considered quite handsome by hobbit standards, Bilbo bit back a smile as he had to burst the boy's bubble. As far as he knew there wouldn't be any young hobbits coming along, though he'd make sure that Fili got to meet some when his Frodo and the other boys got back from their quest. And Frodo had many friends in the Shire and he'd probably be happy to introduce them to his new cousin.

"You miss him very much, your Frodo."

"I do. As much as I imagine Thorin missed you and Kili while he was away from you."

The look Fili gave him said he was pretty sure that Bilbo loved having Frodo around more than Thorin loved him and his brother, but the older of the two brothers simply shrugged that fact off and instead asked for some more Pippin and Merry stories, which Bilbo was happy to supply until they parted ways as their rooms were on opposites side of the tunnel.

Walking into his bedroom to change from his everyday clothes into the ones he would wear to greet the visitors from the Shire, Bilbo winced a little when he forgot to watch his stride, which he'd actually been doing all morning but had been too caught up in the cooking and then chatting with Fili to really notice. But yes, now that he wasn't focused on anything else the ache in his bottom was making sure that he remembered the night before. And the morning too because of course Thorin had just had to ravish him as many times as possible because that was just how his husband was. Tell a dwarf that he couldn't do something and of course he did the opposite just to prove that he could. Of course if he'd told Thorin no and meant it Thorin would have listened, but he was only a hobbit, he wasn't made of steel. Thorin was really good at using his sensitive ears against him, and his husband had definitely felt like he had something to prove last night.

He probably shouldn't have made that comment about Thorin's age.

Undoing the buttons on his shirt and shaking his head over the life he now led, Bilbo was in the process of shrugging the garment off his shoulders when his nose caught an unfamiliar scent in the air. It was faintly floral, and turning his head to track the smell Bilbo followed said nose over to the table near his bed where someone had placed a dish full of potpourri.

"How kind." Breaking out into a smile Bilbo beamed over the thoughtfulness of whatever servant had left the surprise behind, especially since the dwarf in question obviously didn't know much about this sort of thing because the scent was far too strong. This close to the bed it was actually a little overpowering, his nose wrinkling up as he instinctively moved further away from it.

It was a good thing he was sleeping with Thorin every night or he'd have to move the stuff and hurt
the feelings of whoever had tried to do something nice for him. Though he'd have to dilute the mix regardless, that was for sure, or the scent would get into everything, including his clothing. Hopefully that wouldn't annoy or hurt the feelings of whoever had made it for him.

Picking it up to see what was all in the bowl, he didn't recognize the main fragrance, Bilbo shook his head as it began to swim a little in reaction to the strong smell. Holding the bowl away from him in reaction Bilbo set it back down and started to head back to his closet before he stopped, slowly turning around to eye the bowl again.

He rarely saw flowers and never potpourri in any of the other rooms used by the rest of his family, and he was fairly sure that the only real use flowers generally had in Erebor were as medicines or dyes. And the more he looked at the bowl the more uneasy he felt…because as much as he wanted to believe that this was a friendly gesture from someone who worked for them…he had a bad feeling now. Edging back over Bilbo picked the bowl up again and studied the dried bits and pieces before taking another deep sniff, something in it registering in his brain in a brief flash of memory.

This scent, the home belonging to the Shire's healer, his mother swatting his hand and tell him not to play with something. It was dangerous.

Hurrying over to a box that he stored stuff in Bilbo dumped the contents out and then put the bowl into it and closed the lid tightly, his features drawn into tight lines now. He'd take it to Oin later and see if he recognized what was in the bowl and whether he had cause to worry. He was probably being silly…but just in case…

Setting aside the box, he didn't have time to deal with it right now, Bilbo hurried to get dressed and then added his crown and accessories that he'd decided to add to the look since he wanted to send a very clear message back to the Thain concerning his loyalties. That done he checked himself out in the mirror briefly and then hurried to his garden, thinking that it would do him good to spend what little time he had to spare in fresh air to clear out his lungs and head before heading down to meet Thorin.

He got some weird looks from his guard for wanting such a short visit to his garden, but the dwarf often gave him 'hobbits are strange' looks when he thought he wasn't looking so Bilbo easily ignored it, getting his fresh air and feeling quite a bit better for it.

"We need to head soon or we will be late."

Taking one last deep breath of clean air Bilbo agreed with that and left his spot by the opening in the mountain and headed out with his guard, being extra careful not to get his clothes dirty through all the passageways and tunnels that would take them to their destination. Not that he didn't always try his best to stay clean unless he was working in his garden because then it was usually impossible anyway, but this was a special occasion and the hobbit wanted to look as consort like as he possibly could. Plus Bilbo wanted to see if Thorin noticed the significance of his outfit, though he wasn't going to hold his breath there given who he was dealing with.

But his husband surprised him, pleasantly so, by looking him up and down and then smiling at him in a way that said that he'd noticed what he was wearing once he had arrived at the throne room. Though the clothes they were both wearing weren't identical, they had very different styles when it came to what looked good on them, the materials and colors used were the same, which was why he'd asked Thorin to don the clothing he'd picked out for him the night before. He wanted the delegation to take one look at them and know that he was Thorin's from the top of his head to the bottoms of his feet.

Moving to stand at Thorin's side Bilbo smiled over at him. "Sorry if I'm a bit late. My fault entirely."
Reaching over Thorin took one of Bilbo’s hands in his, playing with the fingers a little as he stated that no, he wasn’t late.

"Good." Having already made the mental decision not to bring up the latest possible attempt on his life until after the Shire delegation was gone Bilbo instead asked his husband how his morning had gone, subtly hinting that he wanted confirmation that Thorin had insured that Balin would think that he’d kept his word.

Amusement in his eyes, Thorin inclined his head. "Balin is pleased with both of us at the moment."

Beaming at him Bilbo would have kissed him if the throne hadn’t made the difference in their heights even more pronounced. Well that and he didn’t want to go on top toes to kiss his husband when there were so many guards around including one of his own. It was just embarrassing.
The Delegation Arrives

In truth Thorin had only decided to greet the delegation from the Shire in his throne room for three specific reasons that had little to do with the actual reason for the visit, which was to trade wares that both sides required. One was the fact that he wanted to make absolutely sure that when they went home they would be reporting that not only was the King Under the Mountain in complete control of his kingdom, but himself as well. The second was the fact that he wanted to scare the hell out of his consort's former lover, and insure that the little bastard knew absolutely that Bilbo was now his and that any attempts to rekindle even a friendship with him would end in this Haymatch person's death. The final reason was simply to make it absolutely clear to everyone involved that while the Shire's Thain had had the upper hand originally that was no longer so. And while he had every intention of honoring his word when it came to the promises he'd made to the Thain, any attempts to renegotiate or ask for more wasn't going to happen. Bilbo had assured him that that wouldn't happen, that his people were simple folk who wouldn't have any use for the fancier, more expensive wares the dwarves produced, but Thorin had seen greed grow in the most unexpected of ground and wasn't about to believe that all the Shire's hobbits were as pure and unmaterialistic as his consort.

So since the introductions and such were really all for show Thorin gave all of his guests hard, searching looks as they walked up towards the throne, noting that one seemed to be hiding behind the others which made him think—but no, it wasn't him, it was the one who's gaze kept flitting around, unable to settle, that he'd been most eager to see.

He was pleased that the dark haired hobbit was most definitely shorter than him, and while he wasn't as round in the middle as many of the other ones this Haymatch wasn't in any sort of shape to attract Bilbo in the slightest. His hobbit was a great admirer of his own muscles; Thorin knew how much his consort appreciated a warrior's body as opposed to the pudgy, weasel eyed gnat coming towards them.

Just to make sure he was correct about who their ire was to be directed at Thorin glanced at Bilbo out of the corner of his eye, his halfling paying no attention to the dark haired hobbit in question. Instead, his consort was smiling very broadly at the hobbit he'd first considered as a possibility. Strange. Of course the fact that Bilbo was happy to see the unknown hobbit meant he wasn't Haymatch, but who was he?

The question of the unknown hobbit's identity would be answered soon enough though, Thorin told himself, ignoring the little spiel being given by one of the courtiers as the obvious was stated. Namely that they were in the presence of the King Under the Mountain and his consort, and that this was their cue to bow and acknowledge that fact. Which they all did somewhat awkwardly and stiffly, which wasn't a surprise since hobbits probably only bowed when it was called for during a dance in most cases.

Amused by that thought Thorin inclined his head in greeting before requesting in a civil enough tongue that they introduce themselves.

One by one they did so, giving both their name and the area of trade they would be overseeing on behalf of the Shire and its Thain. As Thorin had predicted the dark haired hobbit was indeed Bilbo's much hated former beau, and the golden brown haired hobbit Bilbo had been so very pleased to see went last, the halfling stuttering a little as he explained that he was Hamfast Gamgee and he was… Mr. Baggins' gardener.
Raising an eyebrow Thorin opted to simply incline his head again, as he was fairly sure that his consort's gardener was already very ill at ease. Or perhaps scared was the better word since it was obvious that the halfling in question felt both out of place and rather like a mouse trapped in a box. But Thorin knew how fond of the man his consort was, Bilbo talked about him constantly, and therefore Thorin could only hope the hobbit didn't die of fright before the man's visit was over.

Introductions having been made Thorin stood up and then pointed behind the group of hobbits to indicate the dwarves that were standing a good distance behind the group. "If all but my consort's gardener would follow them they'll take you back to your wagons and see to it that you're directed to the buyers you'll be trading with. They'll stay with you until dinner, which we are providing for you before you leave for the night." He'd offered to house the hobbits overnight, but the message he'd received had very politely declined the offer. Bilbo had said not to take offense, that hobbits just weren't the sort to be comfortable anywhere but home or surrounded by nature.

"You and -your consort will not be accompanying us, Your Highness?"

Eyeing the head hobbit, or at least the one who seemed to be in charge of the group, Thorin raised an imperial eyebrow in his best impression of his late grandfather. "We both have far more important things to deal with than overseeing a minor trading transaction, I'm afraid. You will be compensated fairly for your wares, and any complaints you might have can be raised over dinner."

It was apparent to him that a couple of them wanted to argue the point, or at least request that Bilbo accompany them, but they were too afraid of him to do so, which suited Thorin just fine since he didn't actually want to in any way bully creatures so much weaker than himself, especially in front of his consort. He wasn't sure whether any of them were related to Bilbo after all.

So the hobbits aside from Gamgee started reluctantly heading back the way they'd come, the gardener turning to watch them leave before sending Bilbo a rather panicky look, the hobbit having no idea what to do now.

Bilbo did though, the hobbit hopping off the short dais and running up to his friend to throw his arms around him, the two hugging tightly as they swayed side to side in their exuberance.

Taking a moment to observe Thorin smiled a little as he moved to join his consort.

"Hamfast, what on Middle Earth are you doing here?" Bilbo asked as Thorin approached, the two having loosened their holds on each other a bit.

"Well, Mr. Bilbo, it was like this, you see. I've been worrying about you something awful, even with the letters you've been sending me to let me know you're alright. And Bell, well she got a wee bit testy with me a week ago and told me that if I was so worried about you, I should just come to the mountain me self and see that you're fine. She didn't mean it of course, but it got me to thinking, Mr. Bilbo, and I decided that she was right and I wouldn't sit easy until I'd seen for myself you weren't just saying you were fine so I wouldn't worry. I'm sorry if that's a problem, I was going to tell you that I was coming, but by the time the message got to you…"

"I couldn't be happier that you're here. And let me properly introduce you to my husband, Thorin. Thorin, this is my very dear friend Hamfast."

The look Bilbo sent Thorin said plenty.

Understanding his 'orders' very well Thorin held out a hand while the other hobbit made an awkward bow again. "There's no need for that. You're a family friend, and as such need not bow or address me by my title. Just Thorin will be fine."
Looking rather overwhelmed and unsure for a moment, Hamfast chewed a bit on his bottom lip before nodding and very carefully taking the hand Thorin still offered. "It's a pleasure to be making your acquaintance, Mr. Thorin. Mr. Bilbo speaks very highly of you."

"And you as well." And knowing that his consort's friend wouldn't feel comfortable as long as he was around Thorin suggested that Bilbo might want to take his friend to his own garden to see what he'd been up to there.

Beaming, Bilbo announced that that was a great idea, Hamfast shyly adding that he'd brought some things for Mr. Bilbo's garden.

"Then I'll see to it that whatever you've brought with you is brought up to the gardens." Thorin informed them.

Both thanking him Thorin accepted their thanks and then stated that he'd see them both at dinner, forcing himself to leave then since he really did have some other matters to attend to before it would be time to meet with the delegation again.

) Escorted by a couple of guards Bilbo walked arm and arm with his friend all the way through the winding passageways that made up his new home, the two hobbits talking nonstop as Hamfast in particular caught Bilbo up on everything new in the Shire and his family. Hamfast wasn't a big letter writer like Bilbo was, so there was much to tell and exclaim over. So gossip from home kept the hobbits occupied until they were approaching the hallway that would lead to the gardens.

Abruptly realizing that both he and Hamfast were going to need to change out of their present attire if they were going to grub around in the dirt, Bilbo called a halt to their procession, stating that they'd have to go to his rooms first so that he could change and Hamfast borrow some of his clothes.

"I couldn't do that, Mr. Bilbo!"

"It's fine, Hamfast, really. I have old clothes from the Shire that I hardly get to wear anymore unless I'm working in the garden as it is."

The guards both gave their consort looks that said they agreed with Hamfast, and didn't like the idea of the hobbit being allowed into one of the royal bedrooms, but Bilbo just gave them looks that dared them to argue with him, which they really couldn't in this case. But the more senior of the two insisted that he had to accompany them into the hobbit's room, which Bilbo rolled his eyes over but allowed. In fact, Bilbo whispered to Hamfast with a mischievous gleam in his eyes, his friend should take it as a compliment that he looked so strong and capable that he could pose any sort of threat to him.

Hamfast gave him a look that said he didn't see it that way at all, but used to Bilbo's occasionally odd thoughts the other hobbit just shook his head and tried to ignore their dwarf shadows.

Heading into his bedroom Bilbo retrieved clothes that he thought would fit his friend and then directed Hamfast to the bathroom to use to change in while he did the same back in his bedroom while the guard, Narvi, waited for them both outside Bilbo's door as protecting the consort was his number one priority. He didn't think this gardener was any sort of threat to anyone, but it simply wasn't proper for the consort to be left alone in his bedchambers with anyone other than family or the king. Not that the gardener had anything on the king in the guard's opinion, but that too went unsaid as he continued to stand guard while he waited for the two to come out.
Once he was done getting changed Bilbo hesitated to leave, belatedly recalling the herbs he’d found earlier in the day. He trusted Oin, he really did, but there were very few people he trusted more than Hamfast, especially when it came to plants. And on the chance that whatever he had smelled was more common in their area than here he’d be foolish not to ask his friend's opinion, wouldn't he? And while he was tempted to wait until after their fun, especially since he knew in his gut that the news would be bad, Bilbo also knew that Thorin's temper was going to hit as high as the mountain's top when he found out, and better his husband have a few hours to simmer down rather than inform him before dinner. Because even if he were to try to wait until after the meal, Bilbo knew the guard currently in charge of him would tell his king on sight if he didn't.

Drat.

Resigned, Bilbo grabbed the box from the place he'd set it and checking it to make sure the contents were still there, they were, headed out of his room to find Hamfast already out and waiting for him.

"Before we go I want your opinion on something, Hamfast." Briefly Bilbo gave his guard a warning look before putting on a smile for his friend. "It's about this potpourri. At first I thought there was nothing odd about it, but then I smelled something in it that reminded me of something I vaguely remember being told was dangerous somehow."

"Dangerous? You think someone added something to it without knowing it was toxic?" Frowning at the idea Hamfast took the box Bilbo held out to him, listening to Bilbo's explanation of his reaction to the scent as he went over to a nearby table and set the container down. Opening it up the hobbit rooted around in the mix with his finger, pinching some of it to study up close before actually bringing it to his nose to sniff.

It took him a couple more sniffs and study, but understanding dawned fairly quickly with Hamfast reaching for the lid and promptly sealing up the box again before turning to shake his head at both Bilbo and the guard.

"If they're selling this here, Mr. Bilbo, you need to tell them to stop right away. It's not safe."

"What's in it that's harmful?" Narvi demanded to know, having already come to the conclusion Bilbo had had earlier, which was that this was another, very sneaky attempt on the consort's life. And on HIS watch too, which was just unforgivable.

"Well it wouldn't be so bad if it were anywhere but here." Hamfast explained as he dusted his hands off on his borrowed shirt absently. "Someone must have added the plant thinking people could use it as a sleeping aid, not realizing how dangerous it would be in a place like this. Or maybe they didn't recognize it, mistook it for something else, though I can't think what."

"Why here especially?"

Looking in the guard's direction Hamfast explained that the plant was sometimes used to put people in horrible pain to sleep for a while, but only the most experienced of healers should use it on account of the fact that too much would put a person into such a deep sleep that you'd think he or she was dead. Stay too long in such a sleep and you'd end up dead as well, the damage to the body too extreme. It was the scent that did it, the hobbit added, it slowed down everything in the body somehow, which was why a place like this, with no fresh air, was such a problem.

"Inhale too much of this, with no one knowing what happened, why they'd think you dead and maybe even bury ya before you woke up again." Hamfast finished, shuddering at the very idea of such a fate. "We should go see the person who made this now instead of going gardening, Mr. Bilbo. If he's sold it to other people-"
"My guards will see that it's taken care of, won't you?" Bilbo gave the dwarf with them a look that conveyed all that he couldn't say in front of Hamfast. That this was to be kept quiet, the guards put on their guard so to speak, and that Thorin was to be alerted immediately.

When the guard nodded in absolute understanding Bilbo stated that he'd write out instructions so that the vendor would be found quickly, the note actually an explanation as to where he'd found the potpourri and that Thorin was not to act or speak to him about it until after the delegation left. He would not have his friends and family in the Shire worrying about him too.

Handing the note to Narvi Bilbo watched the dwarf read it, grateful when the dwarf nodded in agreement to his requests.

Having done all he could do for now Bilbo smiled his thanks and then announced that they should head to the garden. They had a lot to do before it would be time to clean up and rejoin the others after all.

"You'll be sure to send men straight away, then? To fix that." Hamfast asked as he pointed at the box the dwarf held, daring to look the much larger and fiercer man in the eyes because it was that important.

"You have my word."

Sighing in relief Hamfast smiled at Narvi and then immediately dropped his gaze again, Bilbo smiling over that before he took his friend's hand, gave it a squeeze, and then stated that they should be on their way.

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And so the two hobbits made their way to Bilbo's garden for a few hours of very fun and grubby play, Bilbo pushing aside his own fears and worries by chattering away like a magpie with his friend in between planting and debating the placement of various features. It was almost like they were back in the Shire again after a while, and both were so delighted to be in each other's company again that they practically glowed like twin suns in the opinion of Bilbo's guard, though naturally he didn't say so. His mind was on other, more important things anyway, having sent one of the other guards he trusted most to alert the king, though the chest with the poisoned herb remained with him because he would trust neither it nor his consort in the hands of anyone else.

When the time came Narvi called an end to their fun and escorted them both back to the consort's rooms to clean up and change back into their dressy clothes while he again stood guard. Once the two were ready again Narvi and the four guards the king had ordered to be waiting for them walked the two hobbits down the various passageways to the large hall where the meal was to take place, Thorin pacing in front of the doors as he waited for them.

Breaking away from the others Bilbo hurried over to Thorin's side, getting on tip toes to place a kiss on his husband's cheek before stating that he hoped he'd had a good day in a bright and cheery voice.

Thorin's hand cupped his cheek. "Better now."
Thorin was really, really, sick of people trying to kill his consort. Bilbo was his, all his now, and the idea of anyone taking the hobbit from him filled the dwarf with the sort of rage that could possibly level the Lonely Mountain should he ever really let it loose. And above and beyond the obvious reasons why he couldn't stand the idea of losing Bilbo, Thorin also couldn't believe that among his own people, dwarves he'd bled and nearly died for multiple times over to retake Erebor, were rewarding him for his efforts by attempting to kill his consort. His reaction to the attempts would have made it quite clear by now that removing the halfling from his life was not something he wanted, so there was no way the dwarves responsible for this were under the mistaken impression that what they were doing benefited him in the slightest.

And at this point Thorin had to acknowledge that he had to be dealing with a group, there being no way that one lone traitor was so multitalented and versatile that he or she could have been behind all the attempts made on Bilbo's life. He had to be dealing with a group, a very dangerous one, and the fact that they'd given him a very valuable thread by showing that at least one could get into his consort's rooms was something they'd live to regret. Not that they'd live that long afterwards, though they'd be begging for death long before he'd give them that final 'gift'.

But that wasn't something he had any intention of discussing with Bilbo, especially since his consort wasn't alone and they were about to have a meal with the delegation from the Shire. So Thorin was forced to act as though nothing was wrong as he turned his attention to greeting his halfling's friend, the gardener greeting him politely before awkwardly making it clear that he had no idea how to act in this social setting.

Understanding perfectly the hobbit's wish to be somewhere else, Thorin suggested that they head inside, the hand that slipped into his pleasing Thorin as he entwined his fingers with Bilbo's. Together they walked through the doors that were opened for them, Hamfast following behind them since it was only proper them being royalty and all.

Despite the fact that Hamfast was technically the lowest ranking person in the room Thorin had arranged for the gardener to be seated beside his consort, who sat at one end of the table while he was stuck sitting at the head of said table, as was proper.

Hobbits, Bilbo had assured him, weren't nearly hung up on such things as the other races, mostly because there was no such thing as royalty in the Shire. Yes the most important person sat at the head of the table, but bending the rules when it came to the other seating arrangements wasn't that unusual. Not that Thorin really cared about accidentally offending one of the delegation, but he also didn't want them to think the dwarves didn't understand social niceties either. Manners were important to hobbits after all. So he'd sit where he had to, even though he would have rather his consort remained at his side where he could protect him personally.

Thankfully Bilbo had also been correct in guessing that the Shire delegation wouldn't be much interested in talking with him, both because he was a king and a dwarf, but mostly because the hobbits wouldn't be used to going without their regular meals, and faced with a feast full of things hobbits loved to eat, all their guests were sure to be more interested in stuffing themselves than anything else.

And boy did hobbits know how to eat.
His mouth repeatedly dropping a little open in shock as the meal progressed, Thorin looked down the table at his consort numerous times, Bilbo sending him amused looks in return that made it clear he found Thorin's struggle to look unruffled humorous. His consort was going to pay for that later, but at least his men were being more ridiculous than he was. Thorin had noted that a number of the dwarf guards in the room were outright gaping at the hobbits, the serves wearing stunned looks as they kept having to refill the various plates, bowls, and tureens. And the ale these hobbits could consume…they might actually be able to go toe to toe with the average dwarf and come out the victor. It was rather impressive, really.

The alcohol they were consuming did loosen the hobbits up a little too, enough that they started to discuss amongst themselves how their days had went and what they had acquired in trade for their goods. The two closest to him, who were also the more influential members of the delegation, even nervously drew his attention to them with questions about future trade and what they might need from the Shire as they continued to rebuild Erebor.

As there was little in that regard that they would need, those conversations didn't last long, which suited them all and had the older hobbits joining in the other discussions underway.

From the sounds of it the halflings had had little interest in the fine jewelry or gold to be had, preferring pots and pans and tools instead. It was ironic, really, that everyone else in Middle Earth would kill to have access to the treasures that resided within the mountain, but the hobbits would just leave Erebor's riches where they lay, far more interested in their food and simple lifestyle.

It was probably taboo to think so, but Thorin had to admit more people would be better off if they were to adapt a similar outlook on life. Perhaps they would have all had to pay less of a price in this life, if he and his people had placed less value on their material wealth and more on the simpler things in life.

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It was as the meal was winding to a close that Haymatch made his move, catching Bilbo completely off guard as he'd figured that there was little chance of his former friend and more getting up the nerve to approach him, especially with Thorin and the others in the room. But it was as he was finishing his last cake for the evening that he felt a familiar hand on his shoulder, Haymatch at his side when he looked over to meet the other hobbit's gaze.

"May I speak with you privately for a moment, please?"

Eyes immediately shifting to look down the table at Thorin, his husband already moving to leave his seat, Bilbo subtly shook his head, hoping that the stubborn dwarf would get the message and let him handle this. And he did, Bilbo noted, though Thorin gave him a look that made it clear he would have plenty to say if the 'private moment' the hobbit wanted wasn't short and within his eyesight.

Willing to go along with that, he didn't want to talk with Haymatch longer than he had to anyway, Bilbo gave Thorin a small nod before pushing back his seat, motioning for the other hobbit to join him off to the side.

Pushing back his own chair a little Hamfast gave Bilbo a pointed look, silently asking if he wanted him to come too, just in case.

Shaking his head, Bilbo had to smile when his friend gave Haymatch a warning look that promised serious consequences if the other man were to disrespect him in any way. Hamfast was no more the violent type than he was…but as previously stated that hadn't stopped him from breaking a few of Haymatch's bones before. It wouldn't stop Hamfast either, if his friend thought he needed to protect
him.

With Haymatch at his side Bilbo walked over to a corner, well aware that a number of eyes followed them before returning to the table as manners demanded. Except for Thorin, but that didn't really surprise anyone.

"So what do you want?" That was blunt speaking even for a Man, much less a hobbit, but Bilbo wasn't feeling terribly courteous. Or perhaps Thorin had just rubbed off on him a bit, not that he was complaining. Thorin could rub off on-focus, Bilbo, Bilbo told himself, though his lips twitched a little in saucy amusement at the mental images that had come to mind.

"I just-you see I-I wanted to say it wasn't my idea to come here. The Thain…I'm sorry."

Surprised at the apology, though not by the explanation of why the man had come, obviously, Bilbo almost reached out to pat the miserable looking hobbit's shoulder. But this was Haymatch, and he wasn't about to make this easier on the other man. He'd allowed himself to be browbeaten into coming after all, and that was on Haymatch for being too weak willed to stand up to people.

"What did he want you to do?"

Haymatch's gaze remained lowered, the hobbit's fingers nervously scissoring together in acute agitation. "I'm supposed to get you alone, and talk to you, and…he thought the others, the way they'd react to seeing us talking would make the king realize…"

Huh, that was slightly more intelligent and devious than he'd given the old hobbit credit for. Whether Thorin would have picked up on the vibes was questionable though, especially since the Thain had made the mistake of giving him warning beforehand. He would have been able to hide a great deal of his reactions if he'd had to.

And recognizing that the majority of Haymatch's fear revolved around what Thorin might do to him, Bilbo had enough pity in him to take some of that weight off the hobbit's shoulder. "He knows about us, you don't have to worry about him. I'm his, he knows that."

Eyes going huge, Haymatch gaped at him for several heartbeats, stunned speechless.

Lips twitching, Bilbo could feel the Tookish side of his nature rear his head, countless responses he could make passing through his mind. Thorin was superior to the other man in every way after all. But he had been raised too well, unfortunately, and the idea of talking about something so personal and intimate with Haymatch was just wrong, frankly. Even if Haymatch's reaction to learning how pathetic he was in comparison to Thorin would be amusing. A lot.

But he was a Baggins, and so Bilbo had to settle for a smile that hopefully conveyed all he wasn't saying before suggesting that they returned to their seats. They'd had the conversation the Thain had ordered him to have, the other hobbits would confirm that since the whole lot of them were trying and failing to pretend they weren't watching them. Haymatch wouldn't get in trouble; it wouldn't be his fault that Thorin hadn't reacted to the conversation the way the Thain had wanted him too.

"Yes. I can just say the dwarf was too thick to get it." Haymatch looked a little cheerier. "He is a dwarf after all, and they're…" The hobbit's words died off under the force of the glare Bilbo was now directing in his direction. "Uhm…Bilbo?"

"Insult my husband or our people again and I'll go over there and tell him you called him impotent and propositioned me. Understand?"

Haymatch went so pale he looked like he would faint at any moment.
"Good. Now go sit your flabby arse down and mind what little manners you have."

And so saying Bilbo forced himself not to stomp over to his chair, which he retook with as much poise as he could manage given that he wanted to punch the other hobbit in the head. It was one thing for him to think that Thorin was incredibly thick about some things, he was his to insult after all, but anyone else…that was just not allowed.

That Haymatch all but collapsed into his own seat when the hobbit finally took it was somewhat satisfying, but Bilbo would have preferred that the weakling had fainted so that he wouldn't have to worry that the idiot would shoot off his mouth later in the evening, thus necessitating Bilbo intervening to keep Thorin from shoving Haymatch off the mountain. He would really hate to have to help the other hobbit in any way.

And feeling very familiar eyes on him, Bilbo turned his own gaze to meet Thorin's, reading the dwarf's desire for an explanation easily enough, especially since the fact that Haymatch was all but hyperventilating in his seat made it clear something had happened during his little talk with the other man.

But since they couldn't really discuss it while they had guests, Bilbo had to settle for smiling somewhat mischievously in Thorin's direction, and then threw in a wink even though it would probably scandalize the other hobbits to no end.

Oh well, he wasn't a Baggins of the Shire anymore. He was a Baggins of Erebor now, and quite happy to say so, thank you very much.

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As previously planned the delegation was offered the opportunity to remain at Erebor for the night and leave in the morning, Bilbo not at all surprised when said offer was politely declined by all after it was made following dinner. Especially since Haymatch was only now starting to get his color back and the other hobbits hadn't had a chance to ask him what had happened earlier, Bilbo noted, with a barely concealed smirk.

But even if they didn't have Haymatch's present condition to spurn them to leave, the other hobbits all knew that the dwarves were only in an alliance with them because of their Thain's manipulations, and none of them were particularly keen to hang around least the dwarf king decide to take his anger over said manipulations out on them. And above and beyond that…dwarves just scared the hell out of them and they wanted to get home to their civilized Shire as quickly as possible. Coming to Erebor in the first place had taken all their courage, and now they were very ready to flee for their lives and never, ever, step foot outside their hobbit holes again.

With exception of Hamfast, all the other hobbits were of the mindset that the Thain would have to find someone else to come trading next time. And since Hamfast was the only one Bilbo was sad to see go he was happy when Hamfast promised to come back to see him again, though maybe it would be a little while if that was okay with Bilbo. Travel like this, it took a lot out of a hobbit.

Putting his hands on Hamfast's shoulders, Bilbo had to work hard not to smile as he assured the other hobbit that he understood completely.

"Naw, you've always been more of a Took than a Baggins underneath." Hamfast told him, smiling knowingly. "You've found your place here, I can tell."

"Can't fool you."
"Not about this, you can't."

Sharing grins, the two hugged quickly and warmly before parting, the other hobbits anxious to be heading out and not appreciating the fact that they were being held up for no good reason by a gardener.

"Good bye, Mr. Bilbo. Until I see you next."

"Good bye, Hamfast. Take care and give everyone my love."

"I will." A wide smile and then Hamfast looked over at Thorin, his body hunching a little and his smile losing some of its luster. "It was nice meeting you as well, Sir. I'll sleep easier now, knowing you're taking care of Mr. Bilbo for us."

"With my life."

Hamfast stared at the hand Thorin held out to him like it was a snake for a moment, but then the hobbit gathered up his courage and took it, shaking it firmly before quickly making his departure, clumsily climbing into one of the wagons laden down with goods. From there the hobbit waved at them until the wagon was out of sight, Bilbo waving just as hard back.

"Nervous little thing, your friend. But a true one."

"The very best." Leaning against Thorin's side, Bilbo smiled when he felt his husband's arm wind around his waist, the show of affection doubly appreciated since his life had been threatened yet again. Nothing like having a bunch of people wanting to kill you to make you appreciate the little things. And the not so little things in Thorin's case, Bilbo mentally added, grinning up at the dwarf in question.

Raising an eyebrow Thorin asked if he wanted to know what Bilbo was thinking.

"Just that I'm happy."

"Even when I've failed to find the group responsible for the attempts on your life?"

Though Thorin's tone was more wry than angry, Bilbo knew how much it had to be eating at Thorin, especially since it would scrape against the dwarf's pride to fail at something. Not to mention the fact that these dwarves were basically daring to think they could take something from Thorin and get away with it and that was...

"You know…I just realized something."

"Oh?"

"These dwarves that are trying to kill me…they're trying to take someone away from a dwarf who took on SMAUG. I mean I'm obviously not as important as Erebor and returning it and your people to their former glory, but still…these people must be more simpleminded than a…a…I don't know of a creature this stupid, do you?"

Chuckling, Thorin shook his head. "No. And I had not thought of it that way, but yes, they will very much regret trying to take my treasure from me."

Eyes widening as he realized he'd just been called Thorin's treasure, Bilbo's cheeks and ears went bright red in reaction.
Naturally this only amused Thorin that much more, the dwarf still chuckling over it as he suggested that they head in and retire for the evening. As a reward for behaving well he wasn't being saddled with piles of paperwork to do on his own for once, and perhaps, Thorin added with a knowing little smile, Bilbo could think of some way they could pass the time together before sleep.

Still blushing, Bilbo nodded in complete agreement with that plan. "I believe I could, yes."
Quality Time Together

Now that their guests were gone and their duties for the night had come to an end, Bilbo was quite happy to take the arm his husband offered him and set off together down the now familiar passageways on their way up to their own quarters. The whole thing had gone off better than they'd both been expecting, the hobbit mused, and that was definitely something to celebrate in his books. Plus he'd gotten to see Hamfast and spend time with him, and he hadn't ended up dead, which was always a good thing when you had people out to kill you constantly the way he apparently did. Though thinking about that would be a definite deterrent to his good mood, so Bilbo did his best not to think about that as instead he asked about Thorin's work schedule for the following day and if there was anything he could help with. There almost never was so far, but Bilbo figured that eventually if he asked Thorin enough times the stubborn dwarf would eventually give in and give him some lesser duties that would take at least a little weight off Thorin's broad and sexy shoulders.

That he was surprised when Thorin stated that there was things he could help him with nearly made Bilbo stumble in shock, though he quickly clued into the fact that no, Thorin wasn't suddenly turning over a new leaf having finally got it through his dwarf thick skull that Bilbo was capable of being a proper consort. No, Thorin just wanted him at his side as much as possible so that he could personally protect him. Which, when Bilbo thought about it with a smile, was a win win situation. It would mean more time spent with his husband, being safe because no one in their right mind would try to kill him with Thorin right there, AND Thorin would have to let him help a little which meant this was his chance to show him how much help he could be if he let him.

Nuzzling his cheek against Thorin's shoulder, he couldn't kiss the man properly since they were walking with guards both in front and behind them, Bilbo made a sound of agreement with the plan and left it at that.

And yes, listening to Thorin list off what they'd be doing made the whole thing seem about as pleasant as having a tooth pulled, but he was a Baggins, and Thorin hated a great many aspects of his job as well. So really it was only natural that he'd make it sound worse than it actually was. Hopefully.

The list of duties on their schedule took them almost to their destination, the two falling into companionable silence for the last few minutes until they were in Thorin's room alone, after the guards had checked things over to make sure someone wasn't lying in wait in one of the closets or under the bed.

"I can't believe they actually checked under the bed."

Thorin pointed out that it was a decent enough hiding place, especially considering that their enemies had proven to be less than successful in their endeavors.

"I know…but still…" Shaking his head Bilbo couldn't help but smile a little over the whole thing, the search making him feel like he and Thorin were children who'd insisted the guards come to check for monsters before bedtime. The mental image he had of what Thorin must have looked like when he was little was too adorable for words.

His thoughts interrupted when Thorin wrapped his arms around his waist, bringing him close so that they were chest to chest, Bilbo tipping his head up to meet Thorin's gaze with a now much more seductive smile on his face.
"So, Consort, what exactly did you say to Haymatch during your private talk that had him looking like you'd threatened to stab him with your fork?"

"That would be most unsanitary."

"Bilbo."

Not surprised, he'd had a feeling this would be the first question Thorin asked once they were alone, Bilbo smiled as he gave the dwarf his answer. "He implied some things that led to me informing him that if he didn't remember his manners I'd lie to you and tell you that he'd propositioned me and called you impotent. I wouldn't have, obviously, as you'd have killed him for it, but he doesn't have the wits to realize that."

The face Thorin made at him was priceless.

Getting up on tip toes Bilbo kissed Thorin on the cheek, trying and succeeding for the most part not to laugh as he spoke. "I also thought about telling him how superior you are to him in every way, but I didn't want to have to talk with him that long."

Shocked look turning into leer, which had been Bilbo's intention, the hands Thorin had placed on his hips slid down to cup Bilbo's rear in his hands, giving the cheeks a loving squeeze as he asked for a run-down of some of the many ways he was superior to the stupid hobbit.

His consort happy to oblige, Bilbo started with the fact that Thorin was a much better kisser, the hobbit rubbing his lips teasingly over Thorin's for a few quick tastes before sinking into the kiss, murmuring his wholehearted approval when Thorin took over a heartbeat later. He loved the possessiveness of Thorin's kisses, the way there was so often this sense that his husband wanted to eat him alive and was only restraining himself for his sake. Like Thorin could never get enough of his mouth, and wanted to feast on it like he was the hobbit, faced with a banquet after weeks of near starvation.

Bilbo especially liked it when Thorin's hands left his rear for the sole purpose of removing the top layers of his outfit, which the dwarf tossed to the floor without a care before turning his attention to running his hands all over the soft skin he'd just uncovered.

Normally he would have protested the fancy clothes being treated so badly, Bilbo could only imagine how much the finely embroidered and jeweled vest alone costed, but for the moment the hobbit found his thoughts drifting in another direction as Thorin started to nibble on one of his ears, pausing only to ask what else was on his list.

Said nibbling made it hard for him to think, but since he really had liked his husband's hands where they'd been earlier Bilbo reached down to grab the hands Thorin was currently running over his now bare back and brought them back to his bottom.

"I love your hands." Bilbo told him, feeling too good to even blush over what he was saying as he rubbed the pads of his fingers overtop of Thorin's hands. "Your fingers are so strong and callused, and they feel so very good when they touch me. I love when you touch me. No one's ever touched me the way you do."

"No one else will ever touch you like this but me." Thorin ordered harshly, his fingers digging into the meat of Bilbo's ass for emphasis.

Threading his fingers into Thorin's hair now that he was sure that his husband's hands were going to stay where he wanted them, Bilbo gave the strands a light tug, knowing how much his king liked
that as he nodded in absolute agreement. He didn't want anyone but Thorin. Couldn't imagine anyone even coming close.

"Say it. That you're mine alone."

"Only yours." Bilbo met Thorin's eyes, cuddling as much of his body against Thorin's as possible as he revealed in the desire he saw in the other man's brilliant, burning blue eyes. No one had looked at him like this before he'd met Thorin, and as far as he was concerned it could stay that way. As long as his husband desired him this much all was right in his world.

"Yes. You're mine." And to punctuate that fact Thorin moved his hands, the dwarf ignoring Bilbo's sound of protest to yank down the back of the hobbit's trousers so that the top half of the creamy globes were visible to him. Then Thorin's fingers went back to kneading the lightly freckled skin while Bilbo gasped in pleasure and squirmed against him eagerly for more.

Whispering Thorin's name over and over again, Bilbo did his best to make it clear to his dwarf that he knew exactly who was touching him. Who he wanted to never stop touching him.

Loving it when Thorin scooped him up in his arms, obviously eager to get him to their bed, Bilbo angled his head so that he could nuzzle his face against Thorin's. "I love how strong you are too." He told him, too drunk on his desire to care that he wouldn't normally be so vocal about such things. "Take off your clothes, I want to touch you too."

"I want your pretty hands on me as well, Little One." Thorin informed him, setting him down on top of their bedding before going to work removing his own clothing while Bilbo quickly did away with what he was still wearing as well, joining Thorin in being very annoyed that fancy clothes were so much harder to get out of than their regular ones.

But finally they managed to strip down to their skins, Bilbo lifting his arms up beseechingly as Thorin joined him on the bed, loving the heavy weight that settled on top of him, pressing him down and surrounding him perfectly. And while a lifetime of proper hobbit manners kept him from verbalizing what else he loved about Thorin, Bilbo slid both hands between them to wrap his pretty hands around Thorin's erection to stroke the already hard length resting against Thorin's stomach, pressing open mouth kisses against the muscled shoulder above him too.

Pleased when Thorin groaned harshly in response, and loving the way Thorin sounded when he said again how much he loved Bilbo's talented fingers, Bilbo's own pleasure increased with every sound the dwarf made as he continued to stroke him, knowing just how his husband liked it. Thorin wasn't as vocal as he was in the throes, or as vocal as he himself had become since Thorin had taken him to bed to be more precise, but Bilbo loved the fact that Thorin wasn't shy about letting him know when he pleased him. Loved to watch the dwarf's muscles bunch and flex, get all slippery with both their sweat, which he lapped up now with quick swipes of his tongue.

A few words that Bilbo was pretty sure were curses, then Thorin mumbled something about his wicked little tongue before his wrists were being grabbed and then pinned above his head, Thorin settling his weight more firmly between Bilbo's thighs, spreading them further.

Shivering when Thorin ordered him to keep his hands where they were, as if he would ever disobey when Thorin used his growly, sexy voice, Bilbo nodded as he watched Thorin shift up to a kneeling position, the hobbit prepared to submit completely to Thorin's touch.

Taking in the view, he'd never get tired of looking at Thorin in all his naked glory, Bilbo's eyes hungrily ran over the scarred and beautifully sculpted chest he'd come to know so well, the light dusting of hair there, which always felt so lovely against his cheeks making his fingers itch to touch.
But he kept his hands where they were, Bilbo's gaze going still lower as he felt Thorin's fingers wrap around his own erection, keening with pleasure at both the sight and sensations. And then Thorin was shifting over, adding his own length so that they were both in Thorin's grip as he stroked their erections together, the sight of that too much for a poor hobbit to bear.

Closing his eyes and arching his body that much more in offering, Bilbo had to struggle to open his eyes again when Thorin told him to, his husband ordering him to look at him. But he managed it somehow for Thorin, holding the other man's gaze as the pleasure built up and up until he was coming, and therefore blind to the world, and utterly safe and content in Thorin's arms.

As it turned out it was quite easy to find out who had put the dangerous herbs in Bilbo's room the next day, the culprit admitted it straight off when the staff and anyone with access to the consort's rooms were questioned. The problem was, unfortunately, that everyone was in agreement that the maid honestly hadn't been aware that she was bringing something harmful into the consort's bedroom. The 'potpourri' had been in a bag on top of the pile of laundry left on the consort's bed when she'd gone in to straightened things up. She'd been surprised to see the clothes just sitting there, they should have been put away as soon as they'd been brought up, but being the helpful sort she'd done that chore and then followed the instructions of putting the stuff in the bowl provided and setting it beside the hobbit's bed.

Yes she'd thought the herb thing odd, but had assumed it was simply a hobbit thing. Thorin and Bilbo believed her when she swore that she would never have done it if she'd known the stuff would hurt him, and because they believed her Thorin decided to let her keep her job while Bilbo comforted her, since she was very upset about the whole thing once she'd realized what she'd unknowing done.

The matter of the washed laundry proved to be a dead end as well. No one was able to tell them who had removed Bilbo's washed clothes ahead of time, before they could be brought up along with the rest of the royal family's clothes as per usual. To make matters worse the laundry room was just too easy to gain access to. Anyone could come in, especially when the room was unoccupied with no one around to notice.

So as planned Bilbo started going to meetings and such with Thorin, which the other dwarves didn't like so much until they realized that their king behaved a lot better when his consort was around. Or at least he seemed more aware of his surroundings and them, which was better than his usual sullen, 'I don't want to be here' routines. Yes their king did listen, but the smarter of the dwarves soon figured out that if they made the effort to insure that the consort knew what they were talking about, they were pretty much guaranteed that a lot more work got done because said consort wanted to be part of the discussions when he could. And if the consort didn't understand or disagree he had no problems saying so, though the halfling did so politely unless he felt the need to raise his voice a little. And an angry hobbit was an adorable hobbit, which in turn made the dwarves more inclined to pay him the attention actually due him his title.

For his part Thorin was torn between being smug and happy that taking Bilbo to his meetings was promoting good relations between his husband and the more influential of his subjects, and wanting to beat to death the ones who now saw how desirable Bilbo was, even without a beard. His lover was intelligent, articulate, adorably charming, and possessed a lush little body that Thorin had caught more than one of his men eyeing before he caught sight of the look his king was giving him.

That Bilbo seemed oblivious to the looks he occasionally got pleased Thorin though, especially since Bilbo had taken to holding his hand sometimes when they sat side by side, absently playing with his fingers and then blushing so prettily when he realized what he was doing.
Another habit Bilbo had was occasionally writing something down on the parchment he brought in with him, though the words and the way Bilbo wrote them out often made no sense to Thorin. They looked like two side by side lists really, with the one side being words Thorin recognized, but the other list a complete mystery to him.

His curiosity eventually getting the best of him after observing this for a couple of days, Thorin asked what language the words he didn't recognize were in, his travels having exposed him to the majority of their regions dialects.

"Oh, those aren't actual words. At least not the way you mean." Bilbo smiled at him sheepishly. "Those 'words', they're the sounds of your words, at least to my ears. I don't know how to write in your language, obviously. These lists are my way of learning your language, though in some cases I'm guessing about the actual meaning of them. I put stars beside the ones I'm not sure about, I thought I'd ask you or Ori to confirm if I'm right or not once I have a decent amount to do all at once. I don't trust our nephews, they'd find it terribly hilarious to get me to say inappropriate things."

Yes, yes they would, Thorin silently agreed, asking if he could see one of the lists now that he understood the nature of it. And yes he could see how, when spoken out loud in the way it was written, the nonsense became a word or short sentence in his tongue that he recognized, or could at least guess at. In most cases the words written beside it as possible translations were correct too, which both impressed and pleased him.

Picking up the quill Bilbo had been using Thorin used it to make a few corrections or supply the correct meaning after pronouncing the word or words properly, to make sure he was interpreting what Bilbo meant correctly.

Then he picked up another paper in Bilbo's pile of notes, raising an eyebrow over the fact that the top of the page was labeled 'Endearments', with sounded out words underneath with basically nothing beside to translate them.

Bilbo flushed when he held it up for the hobbit to see. "Uhm…you say those things…sometimes. But only when we're alone and…I'm hoping when I learn more I can guess…what you're saying."

Amused by Bilbo's squirming, not to mention finding it a little arousing, Thorin stole a quick kiss before he turned his attention to the list, his own cheeks heating a bit when he realized that he'd apparently been saying a number of things in the throes without realizing it. And while some of them were indeed regular terms of endearment, a number of them were also decidedly sexual in nature and a translation would probably have his little hobbit keeling over with shock.

Looking at Bilbo's wide eyed curiosity, Thorin schooled his features and patted the halfling's curls. "We'll discuss this list later."
Thorin never thought he'd think it, much less ever be willing to admit it out loud, but he actually looked forward to taking baths these days. Naturally a large part of that change in mindset had to do with the fact that more often than not Bilbo could easily be persuaded to climb into the water with him and washing his hobbit's skin and hair was never a hardship. Especially since there was so much pleasure to be had when Bilbo's sweetly smelling skin was slick with the oils his consort liked to put into the bath water. And even if they were both too tired to do much more than soak together there was comfort and pleasure in that as well.

His favorite part was afterwards though, when Bilbo had him sit on a pillow before him with his hobbit sitting on a chair so that he could easily reach Thorin's hair. Having it brushed out and then braided in front of the fire as they talked about their days and the days to come was a gift Thorin wasn't sure he would ever be able to communicate to his hobbit, especially as expressing himself had never been his gift.

Not to mention the fact that he'd never been married before, so Thorin was pretty much going on instinct and how he thought married couples behaved. And while things were better between Dis and Bilbo, the hobbit was growing on his sister, Thorin wasn't about to risk his marriage on Dis's advice either. Her husband had spent a lot of time sleeping on the floor for one 'infraction' or another too.

"What are you thinking about?"

"How Dis used to make her husband sleep on the floor when she was irked with him."

Thorin could hear Bilbo chuckle behind him, his consort's fingers continuing to stroke through Thorin's hair as he played with it. "I can see her doing that." A light, teasing tug on his hair. "Is there a reason I should be irked with you?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Hmmm." Another chuckle. "Well at least you wouldn't have to sleep on the floor if you were in that much trouble. I'd just sleep in my old bed."

"You could try, but I'd just carry you back to ours and keep you there."

"Oh you would, would you?"

"I would."

"I'll keep that in mind."

Settling into easy quiet once again Bilbo stopped playing and started braiding, Thorin handing over the bead that would come at the end when it was requested.

"Did Kili tell you that one of the elven guards complimented him on the braids in his hair? He was quite pleased about it, especially since she was quite pretty herself. Not that he'd admit that that was why he turned into a stuttering mess when she tried to chat him up."

Shuddering at the very idea of his nephew flirting with a bloody elf, though apparently Kili had just made a fool of himself instead, Thorin shook his head in reaction, which made Bilbo scold him for
moving when he was trying to braid his hair. His little hobbit was very particular about the braids, wanting them to be as perfect as they could be.

"The meeting with them went well, by the way."

"Of course it did. They love dealing with you instead of me." And since he hated dealing with the pointy eared bastards Thorin should have been elated by the fact that his consort was willing to deal with them for him, but it still annoyed him to see how well his hobbit got along with the elves and vice versa. He often got the feeling that the elves would like to take his consort home with them as a sort of pet.

"The fact that I speak their language and don't hate them probably helps." A poke was delivered to Thorin shoulder. "Which reminds me, I need to start taking Khuzdul lessons soon. I think it annoys a number of our subjects that I can speak the Elven tongue and not theirs. And I should know more than I do."

Thorin couldn't see him, but instinctively he knew that the hobbit was blushing a little as him from the flustered vibe he was giving off. Thinking of some of the translations he'd given the hobbit before regarding some of the things he said to his consort while they were in bed together perhaps.

"I'll speak to Balin about it tomorrow."

"Good."

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Trouble began with the collapsing of a number of passageways over the course of the week that followed Thorin's reassurance that he'd be arranging for Bilbo's language lessons. A section of loadbearing walls had collapsed without warning, the bad state they'd been in concealed due to the ancient tapestries that had hidden many of the cracks. Thankfully no lives were lost because of the resulting damage as it spread to other areas, but a number of dwarves were injured and a few had ended up trapped and had to be dug out. The instabilities and the order for all walls in the area to be thoroughly checked led to a minor inconvenience for the Durin family, whose direct route to their personal rooms was deemed unsafe for the time being. A more roundabout way was required while their former passageways were dealt with, which added a whole ten minutes to their commute.

Bilbo, for his part, found this change particularly annoying since he'd only just learned his way around the old passageways, and now he was stuck dealing with whole new ones. Thankfully the guards that were always with him knew where they were going, and got him there in one piece, but still...it was rather troublesome and Bilbo could only hope that everything that needed to be repaired or shored up was completed as soon as possible.

And so it was nearly tea time when Bilbo and his four guards walked down one of the rarely used until now passageways, the hobbit's mind on the book he'd borrowed from the library and his mental debate as to what type of tea he would brew to drink while he read it.

It was the sound of rock breaking up from beneath them as once smooth rock shifted and became jagged that jolted Bilbo from his thoughts, all eyes going to the ground as fissures snaked out before them to become ever growing gaps.

Without asking for his permission, not that Bilbo blamed Narvi for not wanting to waste the time, the dwarf picked Bilbo up and ran towards the end of the passageway as the ground broke and crumbled beneath their feet, all of them knowing instinctively that they weren't going to make it but trying anyway because how could they not?
But they didn't make it, and there was no passageway directly beneath them to keep their fall hard but short. No, they tumbled down into an open cavern that guaranteed the breaking of bones on impact, Narvi wrapping himself around his consort as best he could to take the brunt of the fall.

Bilbo thought to himself that the dwarf might squeeze the life right out of him before they even hit seconds before they did, with a sickening sound of breaking bones.

His head tucked under the guard's chin, it took some wiggling but Bilbo managed to get loose enough from the hold Narvi had had on him, aided by the fact that the dwarf had been rendered unconscious when they hit. Something Bilbo was relieved to find out when he could move his arm enough to check for a pulse, the fact that the dwarf was alive bringing a grateful smile to his lips for a brief moment.

The floor of the passageway above them was gone when Bilbo looked up to check, the only good news being that the wall on the one side still stood, with the torches attached to it giving off enough light that Bilbo could see immediately in front of him, even if everything was bathed in shadows.

Sliding off the dwarf's chest as carefully as he could, Bilbo hurried over to check on the other three guards, discovering to his sorrow that one of them, whose name he didn't even know, was dead. He'd landed the wrong way and snapped his neck, it seemed. Awl was conscious, and had a broken arm, a bad gash on his right thigh, and a pounding head from the way the dwarf was cradling it. But he was able to get to his feet, which was more than the others could do. The final guard was unconscious, his breathing thready, numerous ribs and other bones obviously broken from the angles of his limbs.

"We have to get help for them. How do we figure out where we are and how to get help?" Bilbo wasn't a healer, there was very little he could do for them, so he knew that he needed to get them help as soon as possible. Only he had no idea how to go about doing that.

"I'm going to try and get my bearings, some idea where we are. Look Narvi and Dolc over, see if they have any wounds you can bind up. Don't move them more than necessary. They're both likely to have back injuries you don't want to make worse."

"Understood."

As he watched Awl tore the sleeve off of the dead dwarf's shirt to use as a bandage to bind up his thigh wound, Bilbo wincing over that but understanding the necessity. And thinking of what he had Bilbo volunteered the scarf around his neck for a sling, fashioning it for the dwarf and then helping him into it.

That done Bilbo shrugged out of his jacket, the hobbit setting it on the ground before removing his shirt, knowing that the cotton material would be much better to use for bandages than anything else he had on hand. And once his shirt was off Bilbo quickly put his jacket back on and buttoned it up as it was very cold and dank where they were, and then he proceeded to tear his shirt up while Awl went limping off to try and get some sense where they were.

Thank the powers that be that at least one dwarf was conscious and mobile, Bilbo didn't even want to think of the situation they'd be in if he was the only one who could get help. He could barely see as it was, and had to rely on touch as much as the flickering lights far above them to get a sense of the small wounds he could deal with, the majority of the injuries no doubt internal or needing much more than a piece of cloth wrapped around it.

Sitting down at Narvi's side once he'd done what little he could do, Bilbo took the dwarf's hand in his and held it as he waited for Awl to return, unspeakably glad when the dwarf finally appeared out
of the darkness.

"I think I know a way. Come."

"Maybe I should stay with them, so they aren't alone when they wake up. So they know someone's gone for help."

"I can't leave you, and there's nothing you can do for them but do as I say."

Opening his mouth to argue, he was the consort of this bloody mountain after all and Thorin was always saying how much power and prestige he had because of that, Bilbo closed it again as he acknowledged the fact that there really wasn't anything he could do for them, like he'd said. And if he came along that would double their chances of finding a way out. Possibly. Bilbo didn't have a lot of faith in his ability to make his way in the dark without falling down a crevice to his death.

"Come."

Looking down at Narvi Bilbo very quietly told him that he'd be back for him as soon as he could. And then rising to his feet Bilbo took the hand being held out to him and hoped very hard that Awl got them out of this dreadful situation as quickly as possible.

He didn't even want to think about what Thorin was going to have to say about this.

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A short while later, not that it was easy to judge such things when one was surrounded by nothing but the dark and hard rock, Bilbo broke out into a relieved smile when he caught a hint of light ahead. Light, he discovered, coming from a hole in the floor that apparently led to another passageway that was also lined with torches, which meant it must be in use regularly.

"I'll lower you down, then follow after you."

"Alright."

It took some doing, and his muscles sang at the drop given the high ceilings and his short stature, but Bilbo was just glad to be in the light again.

Moving out of the way Bilbo watched Awl come down after him, hurting for the dwarf because it had to be twenty times more painful for him given the state of the dwarf's body. Bilbo was bruised from being held too tight, but that was the extent of his injuries. Awl was much more badly hurt, though of course the dwarf was too tough and stubborn to admit it. And Bilbo knew he couldn't even offer to lend a shoulder, as the dwarf's weight would probably topple him right over.

So all he could do was walk beside the other man's side and hope that his presence helped a little. Or at least gave the dwarf something to focus on besides the pain.

More than half the torches in the passageway had gone out, the ones remaining providing just enough light to get by even at the worst spots, but either way it all struck Bilbo as very dangerous and foreboding seeming, the hobbit pausing to consider a very large crack that had opened up in the side of a wall. He could probably just squeeze into it, it was that big. Which could not be a good thing for all the rooms and hallways built above it, Bilbo thought to himself.

"Don't dawdle."

Refraining from rolling his eyes since he knew the dwarf was most likely just feeling irritable and
awful from his wounds, Bilbo apologized and carried on down the passageway without complaint, his ears pricking up at what he was sure was the sound of voices speaking.

Help!

"I hear someone."

"I do as well. Don't yell though."

If their surroundings were so precarious that yelling could bring walls down Bilbo did not want to stay in it any longer than they had to. Or Awl might just not want him to yell because of his poor head. Bilbo hoped that that was the case.

So they simply picked up their pace until out of nowhere Awl came to a sudden halt, Bilbo jerked backwards by the action since Awl had grabbed his arm at the same time.

"Awl?"

"We will approach but carefully and quietly. These may be enemies, not help."

Eyes wide at the idea that there might be goblins or some other horrible creatures ahead, Bilbo nodded his head rapidly and did his best to step carefully and quietly as they made their way forward until they came to a stop beside a door less opening where the voices were coming from, Bilbo's brows knitting in confusion as he was very sure that the people inside the room were dwarves. So why wouldn't they be help? And surely Awl recognized that the people inside the room were speaking his native language and...oh.

Oh Dear. What were the odds, honestly?

Staying quiet and wishing rather desperately that he'd nagged Thorin more about arranging for him to learn his language sooner, Bilbo did his best to listen as closely as possible, trying to remember at least bits and pieces so that he could relay them to Thorin later on the off chance that it was important. Thorin was quite good at figuring out what he was trying to say when he repeated things he'd heard during the few lessons his husband had given him. And this certainly explained why Thorin and his men were having such a hard time finding the traitors in their midst. The dwarves were using condemned passageways and areas for their meetings, knowing that no one would come that way and discover them accidentally. Not to mention it made it clear how desperate and determined they were, to risk their lives this way.

Of course Thorin had some very awful things planned for them if he found them, Bilbo mentally acknowledged, so a horrible death had been hanging over the ghastly beings since they'd decided to assassinate him.

Lowering his head Awl's beard rubbed against Bilbo's cheek as the guard whispered that they needed to get out of there. The dwarves trying to kill him were in that room, and never would they have a better chance of completing their goal then now if they were discovered.

Given that it would be very easy to make it look like they'd gone looking for help and had fallen through a crevice or bashed their heads on rocks Bilbo could, unfortunately, think of numerous ways that they could be killed and the truth of their deaths covered up. It was rather sickening to think of the sheer number of ways it could be done, actually, his stomach lurching in reaction.

Coping Awl's movements Bilbo backed up as well, the halfling mentally cursing as they did so because this meant that they were going to have to risk using that very unstable looking passageway they'd come across earlier. It was the only turnoff they'd encountered in this section, and they sure as
Mahal couldn't risk trying to pass by that door without being seen.

If only they had the ability of invisibility, Bilbo thought with a sigh. This would be so much easier. Not to mention he'd be able to slip in the room to see who was there. Here he was only a few feet away from his would be killers, and he didn't have a single face to point a finger at once they got out of this mess.

Bilbo would have stomped his foot in frustration if he hadn't been worried about making even that much noise.
Unfortunately neither Awl not Bilbo had the ability to turn invisible, and the Fates remained steadfastly on the side of their opposition as they had hardly begun to make their way back down the hallway they'd come when a support beam someone had put into place to help support the damaged ceiling collapsed nearby. The loss did no damage, it had merely been placed as a precaution and deterrent, but it nonetheless had whoever had been guarding the inside of the door stepping out to check what had happened. And while they might have escaped the notice of others less apt at seeing in the shadowy darkness of a barely lit hallway…it was only one moment and then the dwarf sounded the alarm.

There was nothing they could do but make a run for it, Bilbo knowing with every step that there was no way they were going to get away in time. There would be too many of them in that room, he'd heard at least seven different voices speaking, and with Awl badly wounded and himself unarmed and untrained…what chance did they have?

But they also had to at least try to get away regardless. To the passageway that might very well kill them if their pursuers did not. But it would probably be the others, Bilbo's sharp ears picking up on just how close they were already.

"That crack in the wall, get there and inside it. They'll be too big to follow after you and it looked deep enough."

Jerking his head Bilbo met Awl's set gaze.

"I'll hold them off; you must live to tell the king that Roki, son of Duvi, is the ringleader. It is your duty as consort to protect everyone from him. RUN!"

A hundred words and arguments entered Bilbo's head, not the least of which was the fact that he was not the sort of hobbit that would just leave a man to die. But it was both of them or one of them. They both knew it. With the wounds the dwarf had sustained Bilbo had a chance to survive and Awl did not. And Thorin needed to be warned, they didn't know what else Roki had planned and Bilbo was perhaps only first on a list of people the traitors wanted to kill. And what if Kili or Fili married someone these people didn't approve of? It could happen all over again. And what it would do to Thorin, the dwarf already carrying around so much guilt and self-loathing for all that had happened before when the dwarves had lost Erebor. He couldn't do that to him.

"Thank you."

It was all he could say, and Bilbo didn't look back as he ran with everything he had towards his one chance to survive as ordered while Awl turned to hold their pursuers off as long as he could.

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Having just spent nearly three agonizing hours listening to his advisors squabble amongst themselves like children, Thorin was perplexed as to why his mood wasn't better now that he was finally free of them for the day. Yes he had a couple other meetings to see to, but he had a break for the next couple of hours and the thought of heading out to see what his consort was up should have taken care of his present bad mood. Though bad mood wasn't quite the right way to phrase it either, Thorin mused, he just…there had been something in the air during that meeting that set him ill at ease. A feeling that
something wasn't quite right besides the fact that that grown dwarves should be better behaved. Or at
the very least have the sense to fear him enough not to drive him to the edge of his sanity with such
annoying regularity.

But no, he just needed to take a break, Thorin told himself. Hopefully with a very luscious little
hobbit he wouldn't mind getting naked, provided he could talk his sure to be scandalized consort into
it despite the hour of the day.

And thinking to improve his mood Thorin forcefully shifted his thoughts to ways he could persuade
Bilbo to join him for a 'nap', enjoying the mental images for a couple minutes before a commotion up
ahead had his battle trained mind throwing off other thoughts to concentrate on locating whatever
trouble might possible be coming his way.

But he didn't see them right away owing to the fact that they were so small, the dust bunnies his
halfling was so fond of shocking Thorin when they suddenly showed up in a huge mound of fluff to
hurry through his people like they were water trickling through the cracks and crags of the mountain.

There had to be at least thirty of them, and for the creatures to so brazenly show themselves when
normally they hid from the dwarves…what by Mahal was going on?

Knowing his consort would give him hell if he let anything happen to his pets Thorin called out an
order for his people to leave the damnedable creatures alone, not taking offense over the fact that he
didn't doubt a number of them thought him daft or too damn soft. His consort's love of the blasted
things was known all over the mountain, and if he demanded that they leave the things alone solely
to make his hobbit happy they were going to just have to accept that.

Thinking that they were perhaps looking for his hobbit as Bilbo was often at his side these days,
Thorin wasn't even surprised when the troublesome pests arrowed towards him. But the fact that they
kept coming when it was obvious their beloved halfling wasn't with him was puzzling, especially
since they knew he wasn't terrible fond of them or inclined to give them treats.

And then they made way for one who started jumping up and down in front of him, something shiny
clutched in its paws like it was trying to give it to him.

Annoyance had Thorin snatching the thing out of the air, the furry creature rolling around inside his
closed fist until he opened his hand to hold it so that they were basically eyelevel.

When the dust bunny again held out the object to him Thorin took it automatically, his brows knitted
in confusion as the creatures tended to horde their treasures, not give them away to dwarves. And it
wasn't the coin he'd first thought it to be, and definitely not dwarven in nature. The crudeness of the
metal work…

Having turned it over Thorin simultaneously recognised the rounded metal as a button from his
consort's jacket, the red liquid staining the front of it and now his fingers as blood.

Thorin's roar of fury echoed through the entire hallway, many of the dwarves jumping in surprise
while others automatically reached for any weapon on hand.

Knowing in his bones why the creatures had approached him and brought him this, Thorin stared at
the ball of fluff and ordered it to take him to Bilbo now, the creature nodding as though it understood
before nimbly jumping off of Thorin's hand, the whole pack of them starting to scuttle back the way
they'd come as quickly as their little legs could take them.

"Everyone against the walls! My guards with me!"
Running after the dust bunnies, who'd picked up speed as soon as they no longer had to dodge or wind their way around the dwarfs who'd been blocking their way, Thorin kept his eyes on the creatures and ignored all queries as to what was going on. He waited until they were in a relatively empty corridor before explaining in short, bitten off sentences that the things had come to warn him that something had happened to his consort and that said creatures would take them to him. Wisely no one questioned him, keeping their weapons out and at the ready instead.

Proving that they had surprising intelligence for creatures so small the dust bunnies made no attempt to go anywhere the dwarves couldn't follow as the ran together like one entity. Though they were at home in the passages only they could squeeze through they continued down the dwarven made hallways without stopping, ignoring the dwarves that joined the group as Thorin's nephews and Dwalin fell into step beside him with their guards also joining them as they ran down the hallway until they approached one that had two guards posted at the end, the passageway they were guarding blocked off. A hastily made sign stated that the passageway was unsafe and not to be used.

Those dust bunnies that made it to the condemned passageway first growled low in their throats at the two dwarves guarding the entrance as they went past them, the guards in turn giving the creatures hated looks before going back to attention as they formally greeted their king.

"Move."

"Apologies, your Majesty, but this passageway is unstable and-"

"MOVE!"

As the two weren't moving fast enough two members of the royal guards grabbed the dwarves blocking their king's way and threw them off to the side, Thorin ordering that the two remain behind to keep the guards under watch until they could be questioned.

Even with two down there were fifteen of them as the dwarves made their way through the passageway which, after two turns, revealed that condemned or not torches had been lit periodically to allow one to safely traverse the passageway. And there was damage here and there, a few cracks in the walls that did not bid well for its future, but it wasn't nearly bad enough that security should have been placed to insure that no one came this way. There was nothing in this section of the mountain worth protecting either, and Thorin would check, but he doubted very much those dwarves had been guarding this section under official orders.

"But what would Bilbo be doing in this section?" Kili dared to ask his brother, the two following just behind their uncle as they struggled to keep up with his longer stride. They'd been training with Dwalin before they'd run into his uncle, and they were already quite worn out from having their asses handed to them over and over again for hours. But they'd had to come, and would not leave their uncle's side until Bilbo was found.

"Perhaps he was grabbed, brought here." Fili hissed back, not wanting to say what everyone else was thinking. That this would be an ideal place to kill the hobbit and dispose of his small body without anyone ever standing a chance of discovering proof of the assassination.

Both of them wanted to offer their uncle comfort, but they knew it wouldn't be accepted and that suggesting they would be too late to save the halfling would do more harm than good. They hoped desperately that they would arrive in time, but what chance would their delicate little uncle stand against murderous dwarves? The thoughts of what could have already befallen the hobbit made them sick to their stomach.
For his part Thorin refused to think about any of the possibilities. He used all his innate dwarf stubbornness to block out any thought that his consort wasn't alive and waiting for him to rescue him. He wouldn't fail Bilbo. No one would take his precious one away from him. He'd slaughter anyone who tried to take him from him.

And his hobbit had had four guards assigned to be with him at any given time, dwarves Dwalin had sworn to him would protect his consort to their last breath. Dwarves who had been trained by the dwarf himself, and who he'd personally seen in action himself before allowing them to be assigned to protect his Bilbo. Even if they had been attacked at some point, the guards would have wounded their attackers and stood as shields, giving Bilbo a chance to escape. His lover was so small; he could hide easily and remain undetected until help arrived. His halfling would be fine, Thorin believed that absolutely.

He could not believe otherwise and remain sane.

Hearing voices up ahead Thorin and his group fell silent, their weapons at the ready as they spotted the four dwarves standing with their backs to them up ahead, talking too low for them to understand. And they didn't get close enough to eavesdrop before their presence was sensed, the dwarves in question all turning their heads to look at the group coming towards them with startled comprehension. They looked at him, and Thorin looked back at them, no words needed to make the situation clear to any of them.

Thorin couldn't reach any of them before they'd all slit their own throats, rather than face torture and then death at his hand.

Filling the room with the most vicious of curses at being denied his prey while the others exclaimed or went very quiet over what they'd just seen, Thorin stepped over the dead dwarves' bodies like they were nothing as he picked up speed, knowing now that he was in the right place and that what lay ahead...could very well be his husband's lifeless body. That they had done something so unforgivable they'd dishonored not just themselves but their families by taking their own lives rather than answer to him...

They all smelled the blood less than a minute later, saw where it had sprayed out across the walls and pooled on the floor beneath their feet, drag marks telling the tale that a body had been pulled across the rock to be disposed of somewhere else. It was a life's worth of blood shed before them, as neither a dwarf nor a hobbit could survive such a loss. And to call out Bilbo's name would do no good, as it would alert any other enemies who might be near of their approach. If Bilbo had been murdered there were far too many places the consort's could be concealed. They needed one alive to tell them of the hobbit's fate.

It was the knowledge of what he might soon learn that made Thorin freeze for a moment, the dwarf unable to move as his mind held him captive with images of a life without Bilbo. A life where he would live what was left of his life knowing that he'd failed his precious halfling. That he'd lost his hobbit; as he'd once lost Erebor and almost everything he'd held dear. That once again he had proven to be unworthy of his title and the faith those who were his had in him. His blameless and sweet lover would be dead because of him, silenced and perhaps even thrown away like garbage down some dark, dank hole simply for being Thorin's. As Thorin himself would wish to be cast in everlasting darkness for the innocent blood that would be on his hands as much as his little one's killers for failing to protect Bilbo. For not being there and-

Fili grabbed his uncle's arm and squeezed hard, his voice soft but forceful as he reminded Thorin that they needed to follow the dust bunnies. That there was still hope.

So they did, hurrying down the passageway with Kili and Fili keeping tight grips on his arms,
making sure that Thorin was right with them so that no matter what they faced up ahead they would do so together.

But the dust bunnies were all congregating beside a wall when the dwarves caught up with them, not a body in sight as the creatures jumped up and down and chittered excitedly to themselves. And if the dust bunnies were not going to lead them to Bilbo, as they'd thought they would...then there were just the drag marks to follow.

Desperately Thorin's eyes searched around him to try and find some reason for their actions, but there was nothing special about the wall before him save for the large metal shield that lay on its side before them, having been knocked down from its place upon the wall. It was purely ornamental, but would be heavy and require a number of dwarves to move it, much less-

"There's no indents or markings on the wall or the shield from its fall." Heart pounding Thorin looked again to make sure that his eyes were not deceiving him. "Nothing to indicate it was hung there or how it was secured."

"See here, there are hints that something heavy and metal was dragged across these rocks. The blood hides it to a degree, but I can see it looking this close." Dwalin's voice added weight to Thorin's words as he pointed downward towards the ground, where the rocks had indeed been scratched up quite badly by something. Something like the shield before them being dragged across the equally hard surface.

All eyes going to the wall, the dwarves quickly came to the same conclusion. The shield had to be hiding something behind it. Something important enough that the traitors had moved it before making the effort to clean up and hide the traces of what they'd done from the floor. And the marks on the ground would not have been easily hidden, yet they'd marked it nonetheless.

Striding forward Thorin grabbed the side of the shield and started to push it forward with all his strength, Kili pushing his uncle back to lend him his strength while Fili, Dwalin, and four others did their best to get handholds as well as they struggled to move the shield, which groaned and scraped around the ground as they forced it slowly forward until it finally started to reveal the large crack in the wall, one stained with fresh blood along the side of an opening just big enough for a hobbit to slip through.

"Bilbo?! Bilbo if you're in there answer me!"

A moment of silence that felt like a millennia to Thorin, and then came the sweetest of sounds, in a voice filled with uncertain hope.

"Thorin?"

"Bilbo!" Bracing his hands on either side of the opening Thorin pressed his face close, trying to see into the darkness while dust bunnies swarmed over his feet and into the large crack. "Come out. Can you get out? It's safe, Little One."

"Don't...don't trust anyone out there. There were over a dozen of them! They'll kill you!"

"I have men with me. We are well guarded, My Treasure. Please let me see you."

Another pause, and then a familiar hand came out of the darkness to grasp the side of the rock face, Thorin unable to stop himself from placing his hand over the hobbit's to let his halfling know he was there. And because he needed to touch, to feel his consort's skin under his own like he needed air in his lungs and the greatness of Erebor around him.
Moving slightly back only to make room for Bilbo to carefully maneuver his way out from the gap, Thorin's hands dragged his consort into his arms as soon as he could.

Clutching his Bilbo close, Thorin murmured thanks all the creators for sparing his halfling.

His hobbit was safe.
Bilbo allowed himself to take a moment to just breathe in the scents of his husband, to wallow in the warmth and security of the dwarf's strong arms before he forced himself to push back against Thorin's hold on him so that he could look up at meet his husband's gaze squarely, the information he had to give too important to wait even a moment longer. "The person leading all the other traitors is Roki, son of Duvi. He wasn't here but they were talking about him, and that's what Awl said to tell you. I recognized some of the dwarves that were here, and I got a good look at most of the others. There was another cave in of sorts, the floor gave out while my guards were escorting me back to our room like they were supposed to, and one of my guards was killed in the fall. Narvi and Dulc were both badly injured, you have to send people to go and help them. You just go down that way until you see the huge gap in the ceiling, and go from there up to…hopefully you can see what way we came because I couldn't see anything. You have to help them now."

Thorin's arms tightened around him protectively again. "We will find them."

"I promised. I promised before I left them that I'd get them help and…"

Thorin's fingers brushing over his curls was a comfort, Bilbo closing his eyes for a moment as he pushed back the hysteria and fears that threatened to overtake him and make him forget himself. He'd fall apart later; there were things he still needed to tell them.

Though the next words he needed to speak threatened to choke him.

"Awl…Awl is dead. He…he wouldn't have let them trap me like that and I heard them talking, taunting me with the fact that they'd killed him and it was all my fault. That he wouldn't have had to die if I'd just died earlier like I was supposed to. That I was a plague upon Erebor and everyone who lives here." A hiccup betrayed Bilbo's attempts to keep calm. "I don't know what they did with his body, I didn't see him…the fighting…. he held them off so that I could hide in the crack like he told me. I'd be dead if not for him. He died to protect me."

"Then he died with honor and will be well remembered for his sacrifice."

"He shouldn't have died at all!"

"It was his job, Lad." Dwalin reminded him softly. "Don't dishonor him by taking away from his actions."

Tears threatened to fall, but Bilbo fiercely held them back as he tightened his grip on Thorin's tunic, knowing that if he argued he would lose control of himself and his emotions. So instead he nodded stiffly at Dwalin, who was only trying to help, and then he turned his attention back to meeting Thorin's fierce and warm gaze. "You need to double your guard immediately. The last thing the one said to me, as they were pushing that shield into place, was that I shouldn't cry too much because you'd be joining me in death before the week was over."

"They'll be the ones dead before the week is over." Was Thorin's fierce response to Bilbo's warning. "Now we need to get you cleaned up and seen to. Your guards as well. Dwalin, I leave that in your hands to arrange."

Dwalin inclined his head in acceptance of those duties, though he ordered four of the guards to go and find the gap Bilbo had mentioned in the ceiling as there was no way he was leaving Thorin's
side until they'd rounded up every traitor in the mountain and brought them to justice. Or at least until
they were somewhere safe with plenty of guards to watch over them, Dwalin verbally amended, and
then he'd undertake hunting the traitors with extreme prejudice.

Bilbo was one hundred percent behind that idea.

"Are you hurt anywhere, Little One?"

Instinctively Bilbo's hand went to his left shoulder, Thorin immediately grasping his wrist to move
said hand away so that he could get a look at whatever was hidden beneath Bilbo's jacket. It was
then that Bilbo becoming aware then that Fili and Kili were also there and had crowded around
them, trying to get a look at his injuries as well while cursing the dwarves who had hurt him. Or at
least Bilbo assumed that that was what they were doing, since his nephews were speaking their
native language. He was glad to see them, especially since he didn't want anyone he loved out of his
sight while the traitors were still running around free.

"How bad is this wound?" Thorin demanded to know, the dwarf hesitating to move the makeshift
bandages.

"They, they shoved their blades through the crack to try and kill me." Bilbo explained, actually glad
for how cold he'd been earlier because he was too numb to really feel much of anything beside relief
to be alive. "The shoulder wound is the worst, the rest are just slices that don't hurt much at all. And I
bound it up very well so you don't need to worry, its fine. Narvi and Dolc need help more."

"They will be, I promise." Thorin continued to be heartbreakingly gentle as he studied the makeshift
bandage Bilbo had made with one of his shirt sleeves and the scarf he'd been wearing around his
neck. "And they will pay for hurting you, I swear it."

"Three of the dwarves I saw or heard when they were after us, I know them from the meetings I've
gone to with you. I can identify them, Thorin." He wouldn't forget their faces as long as he lived, and
talking about making the bad dwarves pay was preferable to thinking about his injuries, as they were
starting to hurt now that Thorin had reminded him about them.

"You can do that as soon as you've been looked over by Oin." And so saying Thorin adjusted his
hold so that he could pick Bilbo up, Bilbo immediately wrapping his good arm around his dwarf's
neck as he cuddled his body into the hold instinctively. He wanted to stay as physically close to
Thorin as he could for as long as possible. Forever didn't seem long enough at the moment.

Their nephews jostling to walk on either side of them, the boys took turns telling Bilbo about how
the dust bunnies had alerted them to the fact that he was in trouble, the bunnies in question
continuing to stay close as they followed Bilbo and the dwarves back down the hallway. Bilbo was
glad to hear that they already had two of the traitors in custody, and he was touched when Fili and
Kili both vowed to personally tear the mountain apart looking for the rest of the traitors if that's what
it took to make him safe again. He didn't want them anywhere near the villains, but it was the
thought that counted and he said so.

"Thank you both, but I'd rather you two stay as far away from the bastards as possible."

Both boys gave him shocked looks, but Bilbo refused to apologize for his harsh language. It was
warranted in this case, and he'd have used even stronger words if ones had come to mind.

"Quiet, both of you. He needs to conserve his strength."

Liking that idea, especially since he didn't want to talk about what had happened in any more detail,
Bilbo nuzzled his cheek against Thorin's chest before calling out to make sure that his guards were going to be taken care of, Dwalin promising that it was so. And yes they'd already promised him that they'd make sure Narvi and Dolc were taken care of, but Bilbo couldn't stop himself from asking again. He hadn't been able to protect or help Awl.

Feeling his throat close up just thinking about what must have happened to Awl before the other dwarves had killed his guard, how scared and in pain he must have been, Bilbo fought and won against his tears once again. He wanted to weep, and he would, but he refused to do it while surrounded by strangers and his nephews. He didn't want to cry in front of Thorin either, but since he didn't intend to let his husband out of his sight any time soon that was wishful thinking on his part. And besides, crying in Thorin's arms would be a lot more comforting than just curling up in a ball of misery on their bed.

He would have a lot of tears to shed.

Thorin took Bilbo straight to where Oin was waiting for them in the healer's office, the older dwarf having been alerted to the situation and was ready for them as he motioned them over to the bed he'd prepared for Bilbo. Taking a seat with Bilbo in his lap Thorin kept his arms around his husband, not about to turn his hobbit loose unless he had to. Which he soon had to, since Bilbo needed to strip off his jacket and what remained of his shirt, which was why Thorin had ordered everyone to wait outside until he gave them permission to join them. The dust bunnies would keep them company.

Getting straight to business Oin went straight for the obvious wound, and once the homemade bandage had been removed Thorin could see the stab wound, the sight of it sending new fury coursing through Thorin's veins. Blood still flowed sluggishly from the wound, and even knowing that there was little likelihood that the injury would cause long term damage Thorin wanted to put his fist through rock over it. Or better yet, he wanted to break every bone in the bodies of the dwarves who'd tried and nearly succeeded in killing his consort.

Not even a quick death, but one that would be as slow and painful as the traitors' plan to seal off the tunnel and leave Bilbo trapped behind the shield to die of thirst. To trap him in that small, cramped space with hardly enough room to move, the dust bunnies his hobbit's only comfort as he cried out for help that wouldn't come until his body gave out and he died, a crack in a deserted tunnel his unmarked tomb.

Reminding himself that Dwalin had left his side to retrieve Roki personally made Thorin feel a little better though, especially since he knew the dwarf in question well enough to know that the traitor had too much pride and ego to kill himself rather than face judgement. And while it was entirely possible that they'd get no information from the old bastard Thorin trusted that others would not be so strong willed. And once Bilbo had had a chance to recover a little he'd see to it that every dwarf his halfling had ever encountered in the meetings was brought forth for him to look over and identify. Not a single traitor would be left alive in the mountain by week's end. There would be no forgiving this.

"Thank the gods for your pets." Thorin commented to try and change the direction of his thoughts before he got too angry to stay still. He needed to hold his halfling about as much as Bilbo needed to be held at the moment, and it was true that he would never have a bad thing to say about Bilbo's bits of fluff again after this. The creatures had definitely earned their keep this day.

"I'm feeding them cheese buns for life." Bilbo agreed with a shaky sound of amusement, his halfling trying to sound brave as Oin crouched in to poke and prod at the wound.
Which better be necessary, Thorin silently conveyed with a dark look in the old healer's direction.

"It's a flesh wound, good place to get stabbed if you must." The old dwarf patted Bilbo's shoulder in a grandfatherly sort of way. "It should heal up just fine if you take proper care of it. I'll sew it shut just to be on the safe side."

"And the rest?"

"I'll clean them up, they're just scrapes mostly." And knowing his king well Oin gave Thorin a small smile as he straightened back up to his full height. "If you would put the poultice on his minor wounds I'll take care of the shoulder, Thorin."

Nodding, he hated feeling useless which was probably why his friend had given him the task in the first place, Thorin carefully transferred Bilbo to the bed and then accepted the jar one of Oin's assistants handed to him, the cream a familiar one. He'd had it applied to his own body plenty of times, and it had always worked well enough for him.

Gently brushing the herb concoction over the shallow cuts that had been sliced into his consort's soft skin, Thorin cursing the clumsiness of his big fingers and the fact that he knew he had to be hurting his precious treasure even though Bilbo was trying so hard to pretend otherwise. His hobbit had shown great braver today, and he would tell him so when they were alone.

The wounds had all been seen to, and Bilbo's face washed and a very large shirt found for him to wear, when word reached them that Awl's body had been recovered. The dwarf had been found in the dangerous looking tunnel Bilbo and Awl had original chosen to bypass, the guard's body discovered stuffed in a corner to be retrieved at a later time according to one of the two dwarves apprehended in front of the tunnel. Awl had died of multiple stab wounds, and Thorin made it clear that the dwarf's body was to be handled with the utmost respect and would be given a hero's funeral and burial. When he could he would personally speak to the dwarf's family himself to give them his condolence for their loss.

Bilbo wanted to do the same, and Thorin nodded in agreement, knowing his hobbit would need that to start to heal as well.

Shortly after that news another messenger came to inform them that Narvi and Dolc had been found alive and were being transported out of the cavern they'd all fallen into, Bilbo beyond relieved and adamant that he wasn't leaving the healer's until he'd seen the two dwarves for himself. Which was why everyone there, from members of the royal family to their guards settled down to wait while they listened to Bilbo's account of exactly what had happened from start to finish.

Starting off strong Bilbo explained about how he and his guards had been walking towards the royal quarters when the floor beneath them had started to shake and give away, Narvi grabbing him and wrapping his body around him to act as a cushion so that Bilbo wasn't harmed on impact. If the dwarf hadn't done that he wouldn't have survived the fall, Bilbo told them fiercely, wanting to make sure that they knew that he'd be dead if not for Narvi brave act.

"He will be given the best care and richly rewarded for what he did." Thorin promised, Bilbo actually twisting around in the dwarf's arms to make sure he was serious before nodding in satisfaction and going back to his story.

Bilbo spoke of the darkness of the cavern they'd landed in, and how he and Awl had been the only ones conscious after the fall, though Awl had been badly injured with a broken arm and a bad
wound that had made him limp. He spoke of Awl leaving him briefly to find a way out so that they could get help, and how Awl had come back and led him to the hole that had led down into the tunnel they'd been found in.

"When we heard the voices I thought we had found help, but Awl told me to be quiet, that we had to be careful. I couldn't understand a lot of what was being said, but he could and...and he said we had to get out of there because they'd kill us if they saw us. We started to back away as quietly as we could but a beam fell and one of them came out to check on it and he...he saw us and called out to the others. Awl told me to run for the crack and hide in there, just me because he wouldn't fit and he was hurt and couldn't...he told me to tell you about Roki and then I did what he said. I had to because I'm the consort and I...I couldn't help him."

Sniffling, Bilbo had to take a moment to rub his knuckles over his eyes before continuing, the hobbit staring down at his hands as his fingers dug into his thighs.

"I only just managed to wiggle my way through, I never would have managed it before I came here, and they tried to reach in and grab me but I wouldn't let them. That's when they started shoving their knives in, to kill me that way. They were really angry that there was enough room inside that I could avoid most of them. They yelled at each other for a bit, they didn't want to leave me alive or stand around waiting for me to come out on my own, you see. Then one of them thought of that shield thing in the other room...they liked that idea."

The hobbit shuddered, his voice dropping to almost a whisper. "I'll remember the sound of that thing being rolled over for the rest of my days. It was like it was counting down my death. I knew there'd be no way for me to move it. That I'd be stuck there until I died."

"You're safe now, and they will pay dearly for what they did. They'll never touch you again."

Nodding, Bilbo curled into Thorin again, resting his cheek against his chest as he stated that he only remembered some of what he'd overheard, and understood even less of it, but he'd tried to memorize as much as possible in case he did get out alive somehow.

And so Bilbo repeated as much as he could, the hobbit having no idea that a large portion of what he'd overheard was a discussion about how to go about killing the King Under the Mountain.
Start To Heal

By the time afternoon had turned into evening the Durin family had a pretty good idea what fate would have befallen them. Thanks to the information Bilbo had unknowingly given them, combined with what little they'd gotten from a few of the traitors that had been found and interrogated by Dwalin personally, the plot to assassinate their family members had been uncovered. They might not have confirmation from the leaders of the group, who up until now had been very closed mouthed but were currently being threatened with very painful, drawn out deaths, but they were confident that they knew the most important details regarding what the dwarves had planned, and Dwalin was sure that they would have all the traitors once the dwarves in question realized that their king would show them no mercy or consideration regardless of rank and power. Their fates were sealed, only the manner in which they died remained as yet undecided.

Bilbo deserved to know what was going on, and so after the latest update from one of Dwalin's men Thorin sat his husband down to explain why the traitors had tried to kill him.

The traitors had seen it as their duty to kill Bilbo, or at least that was what they were saying. They felt that the hobbits had forced Bilbo onto their king, and to honor the sacrifices Thorin had made in retaking the mountain they had thought they would do Thorin the favor of getting rid of his new consort for him. Their king's hands had been tied, being too honorable to kill off his own consort, so removing the halfling so that Thorin could take a proper bride and provide new heirs for Erebor had seemed the least his subjects could do for him. Especially since apparently Roki and his more influential cohorts hadn't considered either Fili or Kili as being worthy to one day rule the Lonely Mountain.

Hearing it said out loud again upset and insulted Fili and Kili, and their loud protests derailed Thorin's explanation for about twenty minutes before Thorin was able to convince them they'd be needing Oin's services if they didn't quiet down again.

Getting back to his explanation Thorin stated that at first the traitors had assumed that Thorin's anger at the assassination attempts was about pride. That he was furious to be seen as unable to protect his consort from harm and not enough of a threat to keep others from attempting to kill someone who belonged to him. Then they'd found out, when they attempt to kill Bilbo with the poisonous potpourri, that Bilbo had been sleeping exclusively with Thorin in his bed for a while.

Bilbo went as red as a ruby over that, while Thorin just grinned a little rakishly before continuing his story, feeling a lot less tense thanks to the momentary distraction that was thinking about sex with his consort. But back to business…

Faced with that information Thorin and Bilbo had been closely observed and it was decided that Thorin was in fact happy with his hobbit consort, and his anger over the attempted assassination had been real. This had led to the group splitting up as many of the dwarves involved had participated to help their king, not make him unhappy. They had, however, taken a vow of silence on about what they knew about the group, and had been blackmailed with threats of being turned over to Thorin if they revealed the names of their former co-conspirators. As the more higher ranking dwarves had remained steadfast in their beliefs that Bilbo needed to be gotten rid of the lower ranking dwarves had believed that their word wouldn't hold up even if they were to reveal what the knew. So they'd kept quiet, especially since there hadn't been another attempt on the hobbit's life until now to make them feel guilty about that decision.
It was at that point in the explanation that Thorin and Bilbo got into a spirited debate about the punishment that should be meted out to those who'd left the group before this latest attempt, Bilbo feeling that they should get some leniency while Thorin was pretty much ready to kill them all, though in slightly less painful ways than was planned for those responsible for today's attempt. This argument lasted a good ten minutes before Fili dryly pointed out that Bilbo deserved to hear the rest, especially since Bilbo's injured guards would be arriving soon.

Apparently those left in the group had come to the conclusion that Thorin's actual desire for a hobbit was a perversion, a sign that his time in the company of the other species had warped him. Made him unfit to be King Under the Mountain.

Here Thorin paused to call those dwarves a number of things in his native language that Bilbo thankfully didn't understand. Though he was still pretty pink in the cheeks by the time Thorin was done so maybe he understood a few of the words after all. But the hobbit said nothing, so Thorin figured that Bilbo agreed that the strong language was warranted.

And back to the plan, the traitors had decided that Thorin had to go, for the good of their people, and Fili...well they were willing to give him a chance, but some of the higher ups were apparently of the opinion that since the boys had spent most of their lives in the same world that had weakened and warped their uncle the two remaining Durin men would be just as bad as their uncle. And if that was the case then Fili, as the stronger willed brother, would need to be killed off as well so that Kili would inherit the throne and then be married off in a political union to either a strong-willed female the dwarves felt would do the actual ruling, or was also weak so that the two would both be easily manipulated by their elders, who would see Erebor returned to its former glory.

Naturally that brought about another break for a loud argument between Kili and Fili as to which of them was more easily manipulated, Thorin letting them go at it this time since a knock at the door signaled that some new information might be coming.

As it turned out the interruption was in fact a heads up that the healers and guards would be arriving momentarily with the injured guards, this news leading to Thorin ordering his nephews to finish their fight for the time being since it wouldn't be good for Oin's patients.

Both boys immediately going quiet at the reminder of who they were waiting for, Thorin took a moment to enjoy the blessed silence before he walked over to Bilbo and gently cupped his cheek as he focused all his consort's attention on him. "Come with me for a moment."

Nodding, Bilbo followed Thorin over to a corner of the room where they wouldn't be overheard, though they were both well aware that the dwarves in the room were trying and failing miserably to pretend like they weren't sneaking peeks in their direction or moving just a little bit closer in the case of their nephews.

Giving his back to the lot of them Thorin spoke quietly, though in all honesty he didn't care if they were overheard. He just didn't want any of them saying something that would put pressure on Bilbo to do as they wished instead of what was best for his hobbit. "You want to stay here with your guards while Oin looks them over and gets them settled in, correct?"

Bilbo nodded his head with a determined look in his eyes, though that slowly faded as the hobbit considered the question more seriously. "Yes...but you need me to come with you, don't you? To help identify the dwarves I saw through the crack and make sure Dwalin's found the right dwarves."

Understanding the need to stay with one's men, especially when they'd been injured protecting you, Thorin had already decided his next course of action regardless of what some would say Bilbo's duty was. "No, you can stay here. We have enough information from those who've already confessed to
capture the majority of the group. We might have missed a few, and I will still have you look over those captured to insure we got them all, but that can wait until tomorrow.

Others would disagree and say that finding the last remaining members was more important than Bilbo's need to look after his guards, but Thorin would stand firm there. His hobbit had suffered enough already, and Thorin was not going to ask his lover to face his would be murderers until Bilbo was at least reassured that the guards he was so worried about were safe. His hobbit was holding strong for the moment, but Bilbo wasn't a warrior who was used to facing his own mortality head on or brushing off violence. He would not put any more weight on Bilbo's shoulders until he had to.

"Are you sure? I couldn't bear it if someone else got hurt by them. They want to kill you now too because of me." His halfling looked down at his feet, the emotion heavy in his voice as he bit down on his bottom lip.

"No." Thorin said firmly, tipping Bilbo's chin up to make sure his hobbit saw how serious he was. "That they saw you as a threat to Erebor or a source of weakness...that is just their excuse for what they've done. They can lie to us and perhaps even to themselves, but I know Roki and some of the others Dwalin and his men have brought in. They're power hungry, and they want things run their way and to their advantage. If not my marriage to you, it would have been something else that led to this conclusion once the realized I'll do what's best for my people, not just the highest ranking ones. To them wanting my death so that someone they could manipulate would take the throne instead."

"It's just stupid gold. It's not worth hurting people for."

The hobbit's mumbled opinion was not one commonly heard in the stone walls of Erebor, but at the moment Thorin agreed with his consort completely. No amount of gold was worth losing Bilbo.

But since that wasn't something Thorin wanted to say out loud, at least not with other people in the room, he instead cleared his throat and shifted the conversation back to their plans, since the wounded guards would be arriving shortly.

"I'll leave Fili and Kili here with you as both protection and so that you'll all have plenty of guards watching over you. And I'll arrange for some of my closest, most trusted friends to guard you as well from outside the room. No one will get past them." Thorin's faith in them was absolute, and knowing that they would be watching over his loved ones was the only way he could even consider leaving Bilbo behind at the moment. "I'm going to go see the traitors and hear their excuses myself. And draw blood himself, though Thorin didn't say that out loud. He didn't need to say it; everyone in the room knew it after all. Even his hobbit.

"You'll be careful."

"Always."

"Then I'll stay here safe too." Reaching out Bilbo placed a hand on Thorin's arm. "And when you get back, where will we go? Is there a safe way to get to our chambers?"

"I'll arrange for a temporary room nearby. That way the guards can watch over us and your guards when they arrive. It's not ideal, but we won't return to our rooms until there's a tested and proven safe passageway there." Thorin gave himself a moment to run his fingers through his hobbit's messy curls. "I'll come back as soon as possible. We'll have a meal and turn in early."

"Just us?"

"Just us."
"Good." Leaning in for a moment Bilbo rested against his husband's chest, Thorin wrapping his arms around his hobbit to hold him close again until the guards standing watch at the door announced that they'd spotted the healers and their charges coming down the hallway, Bilbo immediately asking Thorin to let go so that he could meet his men at the door.

Bilbo practically vibrated with nerves as he stood off to the side so that the stretchers and all the dwarves around his guards would have room to get past him, Thorin keeping a restraining hand on his hobbit's shoulder until the men were completely through the door. Then Bilbo wiggled out of Thorin's grasp and was moving into position in a flash to get a look at Dolc, who was the first in and still unconscious. He looked awful to Bilbo's untrained eyes, and the healers were all telling him that they needed to get him to Oin immediately. So he moved out of the way after confirming that the guard was still breathing, Bilbo watching them take the dwarf over to the bed Oin motioned before moving in to get a look at Narvi, who was currently conscious.

"Narvi!" The hobbit shocked everyone by actually body bumping one of the guards assigned to protect the injured dwarf out of his way so that he could reach his guard's side and take his hand. "You're awake! And you're going to be okay, don't worry."

Stunned speechless that the consort was holding his hand, everyone was staring at them too, Narvi just stared at Bilbo and wondered if the potion he'd been given for the pain hadn't been stronger than he'd thought.

Patting the hand he held, Bilbo gave the dwarves holding up Narvi's stretcher dark, sweeping looks. "Well? Why did you stop walking?! He needs to get to his bed so that Oin can look at him after he takes care of Dolc! MOVE!"

Two of the dwarves actually jerked in shock and surprise at how loud the little halfling was. Who knew?

"CAREFUL!"

Bilbo shot them all a death glare warning, which was adorable fierce and stunned the dwarves all over again.

Thankfully for all involved Thorin came over and barked out an order for them to get Narvi to his bed, his men fearing their king's wrath more than they wanted to marvel at how cute their king's consort was when he was riled up. Which was completely unexpected given that the little thing wasn't looking his best at the moment. And still didn't have a beard. But there was something oddly endearing about him.

But the dwarves got Narvi to the bed in short order, Bilbo keeping a tight grip on his guard's hand the whole time as he took a seat on a stool one of the guards had brought over for him. Oin would be busy with Dolc for the next little while; the other guard had yet to wake up according to the apprentice healers that had been sent with the rescue party, and that aside Dolc was the more seriously injured of the two. So Bilbo was determined to look after Narvi until the dwarf either passed out or was in Oin's capable hands.

"You will stay here until I come back for you." And to punctuate his words Thorin leaned down and kissed his hobbit quite thoroughly in front of their stunned speechless audience before pulling back, Bilbo's face going bright red all over again.

And on that note Thorin left the room with his own guards.
Still blushing like mad Bilbo turned his attention back to Narvi, grateful for the distraction. "Yes?"

"You're still holding my hand."

"I know. Oh! Am I squeezing it too hard?" Horrified, Bilbo loosened his grip immediately.

Narvi shot him an insulted look.

Realizing that he'd just insinuated that he had the strength to hurt a dwarf, which Narvi no doubt found extremely insulting, Bilbo patted the dwarf's hand. "I didn't mean to insult you; you're one of the strongest dwarves I've ever met. You saved my life. I'll be grateful for the rest of my life."

"I was doing my job."

"I'm still grateful."

Wanting a distraction from both the pain in his body and the worries about the permanent damage he might have suffered in the fall, Narvi turned his attention to getting some answers about what had happened while he was unconscious, and therefore unable to perform his duties. "Those that retrieved us, they spoke of another attempt on your life. I heard them say that Awl is dead. Will you tell me what happened, Consort?"

"He is dead, yes. He died protecting me. I'm sorry. I know he was a friend of yours." Or at least the two had always seemed friendly to Bilbo. He'd seen them knock heads a few times, and that seemed to be a particularly friendly gesture between dwarves. However painful it looked to him.

Setting his jaw Narvi asked if it had been a quick death.

"I…he died an honorable death." That was the best way Bilbo could think to put it. He wouldn't want to hear that anyone important to him had been stabbed to death repeatedly after sustaining horrible injuries from a fall that had killed the guard whose name had been Fai. Thorin had told him that earlier.

"Protecting you. An honorable death indeed."

"I wish…I wish none of you had been hurt. I'm so very sorry that I couldn't be of more help."

"It was not your job to help us, Consort. It was our job to protect you. And you got us help; Dolc and I would not have lasted much longer if the search party hadn't found us when they did."

Knowing better than to argue with a dwarf, especially when Narvi was injured and might make his wounds worse if he moved around too much, Bilbo changed the subject by asking Narvi if he wanted to hear everything that had happened and what they'd learned about the traitors. It wasn't something he wanted to talk about, but it was better than discussing Awl had died. At least he could gloss over that in the retelling.
Thorin and Bilbo's plans to have their evening meal together were derailed as the interrogation of the traitors took well into the night before the dwarves were incarcerated for the night, due for more questioning in the morning once they'd had the night to contemplate what was in store for them in the very near future. There were many ways to die after all, and Thorin had been pretty explicit as to what awaited a number of them if they didn't start spilling their guts soon.

The only silver lining to missing the meal with his consort was that Thorin wouldn't have been able to stomach food even if he had managed to get away for a short break, the idea of putting anything in his stomach even now making the dwarf want to vomit. He felt disgusted, betrayed, and just…sick after spending hours listening to his former people try and justify what they'd done. Had tried to do. His ears still rang with their excuses, the way they had tried to make it Thorin or Bilbo's fault that they'd been reduced to such dishonorable behavior. Or even worse, the one who hadn't even had enough spine to admit that they'd done what they were being accused of. Staying closed mouth and refusing to speak at all regardless of what they were threatened with. Like Roki. Like by making them try to draw the truth from their lips they were somehow being honorable, instead of sullying their names more.

Just thinking about the bastards had Thorin staring down at his right hand and then his left, dried blood still clinging to his skin there as well as dotting his clothes, though the dark fabric hid that fact. But he could smell it on him. It had taken Dawlin and two other guards to pull him off Roki when he hadn't been able to stand that...that orc in dwarven clothing smirking at him one second more. He'd gotten physical with a few others too, needing to make that physical contact and give the bastards pain. As they'd given Bilbo fear and pain.

Absently wiping the back of his right hand on his pant leg in what was probably a pointless attempt to clean it before he greeted his consort, Thorin admitted that he was torn between not wanting to be near Bilbo, and craving the halfling's presence like a man dying of thirst seeks water. On the one hand he felt like the ugliness of the past few hours coated him like noxious tar, and yet he desperately needed to hold his hobbit and not let go right now. The idea of losing himself in the soft flesh of his lover's body, of giving himself over to the tender strokes of his hobbit's hands and the sweet words of comfort Thorin knew Bilbo would offer him...by Erebor he craved that.

Nevermind the fact that Bilbo would have never been in any danger if not for the fact that he'd made the mistake of agreeing to marry him, Thorin acknowledged bitterly. If not for the fact that on top of bringing the hobbit to the mountain, compounded by the fact that Thorin was well aware that he had also completely failed to protect his consort over and over again since the first attack. The fucking dust bunnies had done a better job of protecting Bilbo than he had.

By Mahal...maybe the traitors were right. He certainly felt like a complete failure as a man, dwarf and king right now.

Ignoring the urge to punch his fist into the nearest wall until he'd broken every bone in his hand, it would only make him feel better in the short term and he had sent a messenger to inform Bilbo he was on his way. Thorin continued walking but must have looked quite the sight since even through the darkness of his own thoughts Thorin saw some of his friends visible pale at the sight of him as he neared the door to the healers' room.

Glóin and Bifur swore fluently in Khuzdul and Bofur asked what had gone wrong now with obvious
trepidation.

"Nothing new. Just bad company that has now improved. Do you have anything to report?"

Nori shook his head in the negative, then grinned impishly at his friend and king in an obvious attempt to lighten the mood. "Though you should have seen your wee little hobbit earlier. It was quite the show you missed."

Despite their worries for Thorin, and their worries were considerable since their leader was looking rather like death warmed over, all of Thorin's company present, as well as the guards standing watch with them, smiled in unison for a moment as the thought about what Nori was referring to. It had been quite the show after all.

"What happened?"

"Well you see, it seems Narvi didn't want to have any of the broth brought to him for supper, and Oin wasn't going to push the issue." Ori's eyes danced like his brother's had. "The consort, on the other hand, disagreed with them both. He insisted that Narvi needed to keep his strength up by eating something and wouldn't take no for an answer."

"I'm assuming my consort won the argument."

"He very firmly insisted, in his adorable hobbit way, that as consort Narvi had to do as he said." Nori snickered as he spoke, having enjoyed watching the little halfling in action. "And just to make sure Narvi ate all his dinner our consort personally spoon fed the man every drop of that broth himself."

Lips curving just a little, Thorin could easily imagine how embarrassed and mortified the guard would have been over that. And he didn't doubt that even if Bilbo hadn't had the consort card to play his halfling would have still gotten his way in the end. Bilbo might have been born a hobbit, but he had a dwarf's steel spine underneath his lush curves.

"Narvi went as red as Bombur's beard." Dori added with a snort of amusement.

"No, much redder than that." Nori argued, the two brothers shooting each other dirty looks as the started to argue about just how red Narvi had turned.

"And did my hobbit eat his dinner as well?" Thorin asked the two dwarves' youngest brother, leaving the other two to their squabble for the moment.

Ori nodded very seriously. "Yes. But Fili and Kili says that normally he would have eaten three times what he did." Which was something Ori personally found a little hard to believe, but the princes had insisted that contrary to what he might think Bilbo could probably out eat everyone under the mountain save for Bombur. Not that he wanted to see the two face off in an eating contest, of course. He'd seen Bombur in one of those before and never again.

"I see." Thorin inclined his head in thanks for the report before sweeping his gaze over the others to include them in his next words. "My thanks for acting as guard to my consort this evening, my friends. You should all retire now. I'll take it from here."

His friends all gave him dark looks.

"We'll be guarding you tonight, just in case you didn't get them all today." Dori's tone was the same one he used to attempt to keep his middle brother in line. "The rooms they've assigned to you and the rest of the royal family are all close together, and we'll all be watching over you until we've eradicated every last festering, treacherous wound from our mountain."
It spoke volumes to his exhaustion that Thorin didn't argue with them when the all chimed in their agreements with Dori, the king simply nodding his head in acceptance of their decision. There were others Dwalin had already sent to the rooms to guard them, but they could join them if they wished. For now he was going to retrieve his consort and turn in for the night.

Everyone knowing how seriously drained Thorin had to be if he wasn't arguing with them, the dwarves all moved out of the way so that their king could get past them, two of the guards holding the door open for him to let him pass by them.

) Entering the room, the lights had been dimmed for those sleeping in the beds, Thorin's eyes automatically catalogued everyone in the room with an eye for threats and his loved ones. Oin appeared to be napping in one corner, though he opened his eyes when Thorin's gaze settled on him. There were three other healers in the room, as well as eight guards. Narvi slept with his brother at his side, watching over him, while Dolc was surrounded by family who were holding vigil for the dwarf who had yet to wake up from the deep sleep he'd been in since his fall.

And there, off to the side so that they would be out of the way, as well as keeping Bilbo and Dis safely protected by walls and the nephews standing in front of them, was his family. Naturally Bilbo was already in the process of slipping between their nephews to come to him, Thorin feeling some of the weight on his shoulders dropping away as he saw his hobbit still safe and sound, though just as exhausted looking as he felt.

Not giving a damn about their audience at the moment, and if any of them decided to gossip he knew where to find them all, Thorin not only didn't protest the display of affection everyone could see coming, but opened his arms as Bilbo rushed into his chest, the two wrapping their arms around the other.

Well, Thorin only wrapped the one arm around his hobbit, the other hand busy stroking his fingers through Bilbo's curls to sooth them both.

His head tilted up to meet Thorin's gaze, Bilbo's eyes were big and solemn. "Are you alright?"

"I've been better. You?"

"Me too." Shifting, Bilbo lowered his head as he nuzzled his cheek against Thorin's broad chest. "Are we going to our temporary room now? Oin promised to send someone to get me if Dolc wakes up or…or something else happens."

"I need a few moments to speak to their families, and then we'll leave." Thorin had forgotten about the families until he'd entered, and there was no way he could not take the time to speak to them regardless of his current state. Nevermind the fact that he had no idea what to say to them, especially since Dolc might yet pass on to the next life before morning's dawn. He'd talked to the head of Awl's house earlier and it had not gone well. He'd broken the old dwarf's heart with the news.

"We'll speak to them together." Unwrapping his arms from around Thorin's waist the hobbit took Thorin's hand firmly in his own, giving it a comforting squeeze before gently leading him over to Narvi's bed first, since there was only the brother there.

"Darvi, I'm sorry to disturb you. Our king and I just wanted to say good night to you, and tell you how grateful we are, again, for your brother's heroism. He could not have made his king prouder with his brave and selfless actions today. Your family will ever be held in high regard by the line of Durin."
"It was his honor, Your Majesties. Thank you." Looking more than a little overwhelmed by Bilbo's kind and genuine words, Darvi bowed his head to them both humbly, Thorin giving the dwarf's shoulder a squeeze because that meant not talking, which Bilbo was so obviously better at. And it was little enough comfort to offer really.

After promising that they'd both be in to check on and speak to his brother tomorrow Thorin allowed Bilbo to draw him over to the group of eight dwarves standing vigil around their loved one's bed, Bilbo of course having learned all their names which he relayed to him before launching into another speech of thanks on both their behalves, Thorin working enough thought and energy to add his own verbal thanks at the end. His weariness must have shone through though since the matriarch of the family, who looked as ancient as Thorin felt at the moment, was apparently still tart enough to inform him that he needed to get himself to bed. He could speak and thank Dolc later, when her great grandson woke up.

"I look forward to that day."

"Good. Now go on then before you fall asleep on your feet, Your Majesty. Both of you."

Chuckling a little roughly Bilbo agreed with her about their need for sleep, the hobbit wishing Dolc's family all good night again before steering Thorin once again away, this time in the direction of the main doors after saying their good byes to Oin as well.

The rest of their family having come over to join them as they departed for the night, both his nephews impressed Thorin by showing surprising restraint in not immediately asking for details about what he'd learned from the traitors since they'd last been updated. The two weren't speaking at all really as they all headed out of the room with their guards, which was completely out of character for both Kili and Fili. He either looked as bad as he felt, Thorin mused to himself, or Dis and Bilbo had laid down the law before he'd gotten there.

Thorin was betting on the latter.

And the quiet remained all the way to the rooms that had been hastily outfitted for their use, Thorin's eyebrows rising a little when he found out that the boys were actually rooming with their mother for the night. Not that he disagreed with the idea, it was a good precaution to take, but the fact that the boys thought it was a good idea, or at least were taking it seriously enough not to complain or mutter about it under their breath, made fresh fury flare in Thorin's gut. Fury mixed with shame that things were so bad that it had gotten to this point. A point where their home wasn't safe.

Everyone saying good night Thorin was able to work up a bit of a smile for his family, especially since Dis actually hugged Bilbo before retiring for the night, proving that his consort had grown on her whether she was willing to admit it or not. The hugs he got from his nephews were appreciated as well, the sight of the boys actually lifting Bilbo up off his feet for his hugs keeping the weak smile on Thorin's face even after he was alone in their room with his consort. Alone for the first time since this morning, before any of this had happened.

"Alright, let's get you cleaned up. Go sit on the bed and I'll be right back."

Too tired to ask what Bilbo was talking about, Thorin simply let the hobbit go into the bath. Given Bilbo's fastidiousness when it came to keeping clean, it wasn't that surprising that the halfling thought the needed to clean up even though Bilbo had washed up earlier, after they'd gotten him out of that hole. That damn crack in the mountain that his hobbit would have died in, alone and starving to death without anyone to hear his cries for help and salvation. He would have torn Erebor apart looking for his consort, that went without saying, but the odds that he would have found his consort dead, much less alive…by all the Creators.
Getting to his feet, his stomach rolling with what felt like the burning acid that must dwell in the stomachs of dragons, Thorin leaned forward with his hands braced on his thighs, his chest heaving as the acid made its way up to his throat, both burning and choking him with its taste and heat. He'd be throwing up everything in his stomach if there'd been anything left in it.

And then suddenly Bilbo was there, his cool, familiar hands resting on either side of Thorin's cheeks, his voice so soft and beloved as he asked Thorin if he was alright.

Words beyond him, Thorin shook his head ever so slightly.

"Me neither. Come now, over to the bed. Come on, Thorin."

Telling himself that if Bilbo could suffer as he'd suffered today and still stand tall he could do the same, and by Mahal he would, Thorin forced himself to straighten and let Bilbo take his arm and bring him over to the bed where a bowl and wash cloth had magically appeared.

Taking a seat where Bilbo wanted him, Thorin blinked as he watched Bilbo grab the cloth and wring it out a little before taking his hand and using the rag to wipe away at the blood and dirt that still stained Thorin's hands.

Staring at the marked skin Bilbo was tending to, Thorin felt his stomach settle down a little just from his lover's scent and closeness. "I should be taking care of you."

"Taking care of you helps me. It's a win win situation, so let me."

Well aware of his hobbit's nurturing ways, Thorin decided that the least he could do was let Bilbo have his way in this. He failed him in every other way after all. This was the least he could do.

"I'd tell you that none of what happened today is your fault if I thought it would get through that thick, dwarf skull of yours." Bilbo rinsed out the cloth again before moving around to wash off Thorin's other hand while Thorin watched every move the hobbit made. "I'd tell you that nothing those…those evil creatures have done is your fault and heaping blame on yourself is foolish and wrongheaded. But I know you're going to put all that on your shoulders because you always do. But I want you to know that I don't blame you. And I don't regret, not for a moment, choosing to marry you. Even if I'd died today, I wouldn't have regretted it."

Reaching out Thorin worked up what had to be a really weak smile for his hobbit as he stroked a hand through Bilbo's curls again, trying to make his tone teasing but falling flat. "You did take a rather nasty fall today, Husband."

"This is not a head wound talking, thank you very much, Thorin Oakenshield."

"Wishing to stay here, after everything that happened, would suggest otherwise, Little One."
Figuring It Out

Bilbo gave some serious thought to smacking his husband upside the head, as hard as he could, but there had been enough violence tonight, thank you very much, and Thorin really wasn't one of the dwarves Bilbo wanted to smack silly at the moment. Actually he wanted to do far worse to the people who would have killed him and his family, but for the moment Bilbo was willing to trust that they would get theirs in the end. And he'd had time to plan earlier, about what he was going to do where the traitors were concerned when he got the chance, with Ori helping him with the words and such since he had no intention of being misunderstood.

But he had more important things, a more important person to talk to and think about at the moment, so Bilbo turned his attention to setting his idiot dwarf straight about his feelings, which he probably should have done before, when he'd known someone was trying to kill him. It was sort of important after all, a gift meant to be shared rather than horded.

"Thorin." Bilbo waited until he saw that he had his husband's full attention before continuing. "You need to use your head for something other than knocking heads with other people when it comes to my motives for marrying you."

The look the dwarf aimed in his direction made it clear that Thorin neither understood nor was amused.

Sighing, Bilbo decided to see if you could lead a dwarf to understanding without knocking him upside the head with it. Because yes, he was sort of hoping he wouldn't have to risk blurting the words out himself like an idiot. "Thorin, do you think I have any interest in gold or jewels?"

"No. You're very odd that way." It was strained, but Thorin managed a weak smirk.

"And you know that I didn't marry you because I wanted to be royalty, yes?"

Looking intrigued instead of depressed and sorry for himself, at least for the moment, Thorin cocked his head to the side as he smirked more naturally. "I would agree that that's true, though you do seem to enjoy ordering people about quite a lot, Hobbit."

Blushing over that, Bilbo knew that he had become a great deal more outspoken and perhaps even bossy since he'd come to the Lonely Mountain, but he was related to hobbits that were even worse, like Lobelia, and so Bilbo decided that he wasn't letting his time with the dwarves alter him too much, which was the main thing.

And changing the topic back to what they were supposed to be discussing, because they had to get this sorted out before the both passed out from exhaustion, Bilbo posed his next question. "And I think we can agree that hobbits, even unusual ones like myself, don't generally choose to live inside mountains without a very good reason. I'm probably the only one to ever do it willingly to the best of my knowledge, in fact."

"We can agree about that, yes. Where are you going with this, Little One?" Reaching over Thorin framed Bilbo's hips with his hands, just resting them there as he drew Bilbo in a little closer.

Placing his hands over top of Thorin's Bilbo smiled, rubbing their skins ever so slightly together. "I'm trying to get you to realize why I'm here, Thorin. And why I don't regret for a minute choosing to come here and marry you."
Rather than understanding dawning, Thorin's brows furrow with confusion, making it obvious that it had been a while since the dwarf had seriously asked himself why Bilbo had married him in the first, especially in light of recent events and all the reasons Bilbo had been given to not want to be here. Not to mention the fact that Thorin knew him better now, and therefore should have a better idea who Bilbo was and how he thought and felt about things.

It took the dwarf a bit, and then Thorin offered his first possibility. "For adventure?"

Bilbo fought the urge to smack his forehead with his palm in exasperation. "I'd have gone with my boys if that was the case, Thorin. I wouldn't have to worry about them, now would I, if I was with them. If I thought I was the sort for that sort of adventure I'd have gone with them, and it wouldn't have been a lifetime commitment."

A much longer time passed before Thorin guessed again. "To get away from that gobshite, Haymatch?"

Bilbo snorted in derision at the thought. "Please. He stopped mattering years ago. And he never mattered enough for me to leave my very comfortable hobbit hole, thank you very much."

"Which I still don't see the appeal of."

"Likewise, when it comes to living in a mountain."

"Yet you stay."

"Yet I stay. And you have yet to guess why."

More confused looks from Thorin, who frankly looked adorable when he was this befuddled. Not that Bilbo would tell him so, since then he'd stop. Drawing this out was also sort of tempting, especially since he was getting more than a little nervous about how Thorin would react when he confessed the closer he got to saying the words. But he also remembered well the way Thorin had looked and held him earlier. And that gave Bilbo the strength to lift his hands up to cup Thorin's cheeks.

"I'll give you a hint." Leaning forward Bilbo pressed his lips against Thorin's in a warm, loving kiss that he hoped conveyed his feelings for him. How Thorin was everything to him and he would have married the dwarf even if he'd been penniless and living in a swamp somewhere.

Unfortunately, judging by the confused look Thorin was still giving him after the kiss had ended, Bilbo was thinking that no, Thorin still didn't have a clue.

"But you said you didn't think I would take you to bed."

"All the Creators save me from the thick mindedness of dwarves. I love you, you silly dwarf!"

"Oh."

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While he was nowhere near as in touch with his feelings as the tree huggers of the world seemed to be, even Thorin knew that his one word response to his husband's declaration of love wasn't a sufficient reply by any means. That was the sort of response that would have him sleeping on the floor and unwelcome in their bed for possible months to come, actually. And if his hobbit were more violent Thorin would have entertained the idea that the offense of such a weak word to describe his happiness would have been grounds in Bilbo's books to maim him. Or at least attempt to.
But regardless he needed to save himself, so Thorin drew Bilbo in to kiss his consort to the best of his tired ability, hoping that by the time he'd finished Bilbo would either be too happy to care that Thorin didn't have the words, or by some miracle his undeniably thick head would have a proper response.

Which of course didn't happen since his mind just got stuck on the question of how Bilbo could have married him for love, which had Thorin being stupid enough to end the kiss to ask how Bilbo could have fallen for him after only one real meeting.

Though perhaps the gods were with him a little, since Bilbo looked more amused than upset by the question as Thorin's hobbit leaned in to rest their foreheads against each other's.

"I wasn't truly living when we met. I was…content with my life. The rut I was in. But there was no excitement, no reason to get up in the morning. And then I met you, and you woke me up. For the first time in a long time I saw something I wanted enough to sacrifice everything else to call my own. You. I didn't love you then, Husband, but I knew in my very bones that if I didn't accept your proposal I'd regret it for the rest of my life. Love grew from that, and keeps growing every day."

Taking a small step back Bilbo's face was full of hope and vulnerability. "Is it all right with you, that I love you?"

"I consider it a great honor and treasure." The words sounded stupid to Thorin's ears, but they obviously pleased his hobbit judging from the huge smile that broke over the halfling's face, brighter than the sun in its brilliance.

And since he didn't have any more words, or too many words, perhaps, Thorin placed his hands under his consort's thighs and used them to lift him up as he stood up, before turning and tumbling them both onto the bed, careful not to squish him.

In between kisses and gentle touches they slowly shed their clothing which they tossed aside so that they could touch and kiss more. His hobbit's body was a constant joy to him, Thorin thought with tender care in every touch he gave it, so different from a dwarf's in his soft curves and satin smooth skin. In the way it flushed with color under his fingers and tasted so seductively on his tongue.

Thorin wasn't even aware that he'd been murmuring his thoughts out loud until Bilbo echoed his thoughts back, though Bilbo's compliments were about how hard and strong Thorin's body was, how much he loved his weight on him and the scrape of his beard on his own skin.

Then embarrassment had Bilbo burying his face against Thorin's throat, Thorin chuckling in response as he gently wrestled them under the bed covers with his hobbit lovingly wrapped up in his arms as they cuddled skin to skin, and simply gloried in their closeness. In being together. Safe and close. Breath and bodies entwined.

He would have liked to have joined their bodies more intimately, but there was no oil within easy reach and Thorin wouldn't use just spit or their seed, wouldn't risk even a moment of pain between them as their bodies reminded them that they were alive and together. Not to mention they were too tired at this point to do more than this as it was.

Besides this was more than enough for both of them.

Would always be more than enough.

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The next morning Thorin enjoyed watching his halfling get dressed, especially since it meant he
could admire the marks his beard and lips had left on the delicious curves he'd tasted during the early morning, when he'd pulled his consort from his nightmare with loving kisses and strokes that had soothed them both so that they could fall asleep again afterwards. And since he had no wish to think about the darkness that had haunted the edge of his own dreams that night Thorin forced himself to simply admire his hobbit while bemoaning the fact that those claiming marks had to be covered up now. Of course as much as he wanted everyone to know just who Bilbo belonged to Thorin also knew that he'd gut anyone who dared to look upon his halfling's naked body for none medical reasons too.

A true dilemma, Thorin acknowledged with a smirk.

And in this case clothes were doubly important since they would be leaving here to face the traitors so that Bilbo could personal identify the ones he'd seen and heard. His hobbit wanted to look the part of consort, and Thorin had to admit that his halfling looking stunning in his finery even if Thorin did prefer the simple garments his hobbit usually wore. So much easier to remove at the end of the night.

When Bilbo went rummaging around in the cabinet that turned out to contain a box with a selection of jewellery Thorin raised an eyebrow, especially since the hobbit never wore any of that unless he was told he needed to.

The look on his consort's face gave him pause too, it was so set into lines that made Thorin think that his halfling was up to something. Because as he watched Bilbo very carefully tipped the ornate case holding all the rings he'd been supplied with onto the bed covers, spreading them out with his hand before picking rings up seemingly at random to place on his fingers with a great deal of focus.

It was odd to that the ones he picked were all ones with large gems on them, as well as featuring a variety of stones without any attempt to coordinate by color or type of metal. Even odder was the fact that his hobbit apparently wanted a ring on every finger save for Bilbo's thumb on his right hand, but not a one on his left to balance things out. His consort might not be the sort to like dressing royal, but when he did he usually did so with some fussiness and definite style.

But Thorin didn't comment as Bilbo gathered the remaining rings up, placed them back in their box, and then returned it to its former resting place, the dwarf sensing that his consort had his reasons and didn't feel like sharing them at the moment. And even if he didn't, Thorin didn't want to discourage his hobbit from wearing the jewellery by questioning his taste.

So Thorin kept his mouth shut save for reminding his consort that he was to stay by his side at all times when they visited the traitors, which Bilbo agreed to without hesitation. Thankfully.

Once they were ready the two of them headed out with their guards, Thorin torn between being annoyed and grateful for the fact that Dwalin had gone a little overboard when it came to the number of guards he'd assigned them. And while it was certainly in his power to dismiss some of them Thorin resigned himself to being squished and instead concentrated on the small hand he held in his, Bilbo's wellbeing all that mattered after all.

Dwalin was waiting for them at the end of the hallway, the guards parting enough to let him through so that he could move in to claim the spot on Bilbo's other side, essentially sandwiching the little hobbit between the two of them. Which Bilbo obviously noticed, but after giving them looks that said it wasn't necessary the hobbit returned to staring straight ahead, lost in his own thoughts it seemed as he remained silent for the rest of the trip to the holding room, where nine dwarves knelt in the middle of the space, their arms chained behind their backs, their legs manacled. Their faces were bruised, and their expressions ran the gambit from fear to belligerence as they faced down their king and consort.
Though a number of them lost their nerve under Thorin's cold stare, which he used ruthlessly to his advantage as for the first couple minutes he just stood there, looking them over without saying a word, letting his presence do all the work for them. For now.

When Bilbo tugged on his hand, which he still held, Thorin looked down at him questioningly.

"Can I speak to them?" Bilbo kept his voice low, for his ears only.

"Yes." Raising his voice, Thorin made it clear that the traitors were to stay where they were, and if one of them so much as attempted to shuffle towards his consort Thorin would make him very sorry he'd lived to come back to Erebor.

Letting go of his hand, Bilbo walked over to stand a couple of feet in front of them while Thorin hovered protectively, his hobbit surprising everyone when he carefully spoke to the traitors in perfect Khuzdul without so much as a pause or stutter. "When I point to you I want you to tell me your name, profession, and whether you're guilty or not."

Starting at the beginning of the line without waiting for them to acknowledge his words, Bilbo pointed at each dwarf in turn, none of the men refusing to speak, though most kept their responses as short and to the point as possible. Four of them confessed to being guilty, three didn't give that answer, and the other two denied their involvement in any wrongdoing.

Once he was done Bilbo pointed to each man in turn, confirming that six of them he'd seen visually, and one he was dead sure he'd heard talking in the meeting. The other two he wasn't sure of, though one of them had confessed so that just left the one in question.

Nodding his head Thorin was about to tell his consort that there was no reason for him to stay behind, and that he'd escort him out, when Bilbo spoke again, in a tone of voice that was so antithesis to his usual warm, kind voice that his earlier tone sounded downright motherly in comparison.

"What you did is unforgivable, killing Awl and then dumping his body in some dirty, cobweb infested hallway. Trapping me to die of starvation or lack of water…not caring how that would hurt my family, what that would do to Thorin. Unforgivable. Completely and unquestionably unforgivable. So just to be clear, this is for them."

And so saying Bilbo marched up to the first dwarf, drew back his fist, and using the full force of his body punched the dwarf in front of him as hard as he could in the face, blood immediately welling up as the rings Bilbo was wearing cut into the dwarf's flesh while everyone gaped at him in shock.

By the third dwarf Thorin knew that that was why the hobbit had chosen to wear the rings, and those specific ones. Because together, they'd become makeshift brass knuckles.

When the hobbit reached the one whose role in the assassination attempts and Awl's murder were unclear Bilbo pointed his bloodied finger in the dwarf's direction and stated that he would be back to deliver his deserved blow if it was confirmed that he'd been a part of the plotting, and then moved on to the next dwarf until all but the one had blood dripping down their faces to the floor.

"Now I'll go." Having walked over to Thorin Bilbo didn't take his hand again, though that probably had to do with the fact that his hand had to have suffered considerable damage making contact with so many hard heads, though it would appear that his hobbit was still too angry to feel the damage.

And just that simply Thorin knew that he would never find someone so perfect for him.

Cupping his beloved treasure's face between his hands Thorin leaned in and brushed his lips against
his consort's, pride and love shining in his eyes for his halfling before he spoke the words, just low enough for his hobbit's ears alone.

"I love you too, Little One."
A Happy Ending

Note, the song they sing is based on the Rankin Family song 'The Mull River Shuffle'. Most if not all of you are probably too young to know the band, but they own the song save for the changes to the lyrics I made.

A Happy Ending

In the two weeks that followed all the dwarves involved in the conspiracy against the royal family were rooted out and punished for their crimes. Those who had been part of the original group, but who had broken away when it became apparent that Bilbo was not a threat to their king’s happiness, were, for the most part, simply banished from the Lonely Mountain. Those directly responsible for the attempt on Bilbo’s life, and Awl death were put to death immediately, the executions made public for all to see. And Bilbo could have done without witnessing that part, he’d used up all the anger and darkness in his heart slapping each of them before, but he’d understood that as consort he had to be there at Thorin’s side. That to do otherwise would be to appear weak and unable to perform his duties.

And he was glad they were dead, no matter what that might say about him and his morals. Awl and Fai were dead, and both Narvi and Dolc faced months of pain and hardship, especially Dolc, as they continued to recover from their injuries from the fall. And while the floor crumbling under their feet hadn’t been the traitors’ doing, the fact that Bilbo had been so heavily guarded was, and so Bilbo laid at least some blame on them for that as well.

Not that his number of guards had gone down even now that the threats had been removed. Thorin had yet to get over how close Bilbo had come to losing his life, and for the time being the hobbit was willing to humor his husband, especially since the extra guards did make him feel a little better. Or they did when he wasn’t horrified at the idea that any one of them could be called to give up his life for him if someone else attacked him in the future, that is. But Thorin had made it clear that they were there to stay for the foreseeable future, and so to make his husband happy Bilbo wasn’t making a big fuss about it. Yet.

Because his husband loved him, Bilbo all but sang to himself in his head when he thought about it, the fact that he was constantly surrounded by other dwarves helping him keep his joy under wraps for the most part. Though he was getting some odd looks occasionally, Bilbo acknowledged, for kissing Thorin in public without warning or for any particular reason, and ‘smiling’ too much according to his nephews. But that was dwarves for you. They were so odd when it came to affectionate gestures.

But he wasn’t going to let their opinions matter, especially since Thorin didn’t mind and in fact had been showing his appreciate for all those kisses every stolen moment alone they could get.

Since the first time Thorin hadn’t said he loved him again, but that was okay since Bilbo said it enough for the both of them, now that he knew his feelings were returned and not a burden. Because he knew that Thorin had meant it when he’d said it before. His dwarf was just not the sort to show his love and affection through words, and now that he knew his feelings were returned Bilbo didn’t need to hear them again. Though he planned to prompt Thorin to say them every year or so, or just when he needed to hear them again after a particularly hard day.

As for his life as a consort, well apparently the whole slapping his would be killers thing had not only gotten out to the general public, but had seriously improved his standing in certain quarters. Which Bilbo didn’t exactly improve of, since violence shouldn’t earn him any special regard, but it
was also nice to feel more accepted and wanted in his home.

So he had his people's respect for the most part, a new family and a husband who loved him, and his
garden to stay in touch with his hobbit roots. All he needed was his boys to come home from their
journey, and then life as Bilbo knew it would be absolutely perfect.

A couple months after the last attempted on his life, the gods willing, Bilbo found himself sitting on
the small throne Thorin had had made for him, which had been placed beside Thorin's for when he
joined his husband for court gatherings or the greeting of important guests in the main throne room.
Bilbo had told Thorin he was just fine standing beside him when those events occurred, but he'd
been overridden on that point. And admittedly it was nice to sit, even if the chair was far from the
most comfortable thing Bilbo had ever sat on. That was the problem with living with people who
cared more about the look and functionality than comfort. But at least they'd gotten them to add a
cushion for his poor bottom.

Today they were meeting with a delegation from Mirkwood, which had not put Thorin in a good
mood in the days leading up to it, but Bilbo had promised his dwarf a bath together, as well as a full
body massage if he was nice enough to let Bilbo do most of the talking where the elves were
concerned, and Thorin had agreed. Grudgingly. And only because Bilbo had given him a sneak peek
the night before of what awaited him if he behaved, and made it clear Thorin would be punished if
he didn't.

Though Thorin had most likely been right when he'd stated that Bilbo wouldn't be able to resist him
for long. Resisting Thorin was just not a skill Bilbo possessed or was likely ever to develop. And
they both knew it.

And since thinking about the night ahead of them made Bilbo want to squirm, and he didn't want to
draw Thorin's attention to him during this talk, Bilbo forced himself to focus on the discussion
underway until something new drew his attention from the dwarves and elves in the room, a lull in
the conversation for just a couple moments allowing the new sound to reach his ears.

Not just his ears either, it seemed, since most of the others had turned their attention to looking
around too, trying to figure out what they were hearing too.

At first it was just odd background noise, echoing off the walls in a jumble that made no sense to
Bilbo no matter how hard he tried to sort it out. And then slowly familiar words were caught here
and there, and then finally, as the source of the sounds actually stepped into the room, it became
apparent that the sound was singing, the singers four very tired hobbits, one now white haired
wizard, and Arthur, his voice not nearly so loud or joyful as the others, though recognizable to
Bilbo's ears.

"- up yonder it's old Gamgee
he's having a few, he can hardly see
Wrapped his buggy around a tree
Someone call the Rangers

Raisin' the mug and ringin' bells
There's plenty of stories that they will tell
Some are born of true detail
And some are purely fiction."

Whooping with joy, and not behaving at all like a proper consort would, Bilbo couldn't have cared
less about what anyone thought of him as he jumped off his throne and down the short stairs to start running towards the group still singing their hearts out, the elves parting ways for him as he barrelled towards them. And on some level he knew that Thorin was coming after him, naturally, but Bilbo's sole focus was on getting to his boys as he added his voice to theirs.

'Up spoke fine young Gamwich
At the dance got a fearful hammerin'
Today I'll stutter and stammer in
There'll be hell to pay come Saturday

Raisin' the mug and ringin' bells
There's plenty of stories that they will tell
Some are born of true detail
And some are purely fiction

There they write
By the light
 Burning bright
Every night
Waiting for the fish to bite
Along the shores of Cocomaugh."

Barrelling into Frodo first, his most precious nephew finally back with him, Bilbo hugged him fiercely, Pippin and Merry glomping them as well to show their enthusiasm as they all stopped singing to hug the heck out of each other. Not that they cared about what a sight they must be as they all hugged each other hard enough to bruise, and then Frodo broke away long enough to drag the always shy Sam over so that Bilbo could give him lots of hugs too.

And then Bilbo hugged Gandalf as well, followed by Arthur, the latter embrace quick and dignified as one would expect given their audience, and then Arthur inclined his head and walked around the group of hobbits to join the group of elves who were watching the overly emotional displays of affection with slightly raised eyebrows.

Though the way Arthur's cousin Legolas was standing close to his father, and the hand Thranduil had on his son shoulder probably spoke volumes in elvish about how much the two had missed each other during their separation.

A clearing of a very familiar throat reminded Bilbo belatedly of his husband's presence behind him, which had Bilbo clearing his own throat as he whirled around, still beaming like mad because how could he not as he proudly announced that his boys had come home. So to speak.

"So I see." Inclining his head Thorin gave them a smile, though it was a bit tense. The reason for that being apparent when his next question was where Gimli was, obviously worried that something might have happened to his friend Gloin's son.

"Oh, don't worry about him. We ran into his dad on the way in and he stayed behind with him." Pippin's wide grin lit up his face as he assured Thorin that the dwarf in their small fellowship was indeed well. "I'm Pippin, by the way. Are we supposed to bow to you? Aragorn said we shouldn't have to bow to anyone after what we did, and you're family now that you've married Uncle Bilbo, but Gandalf said we probably should. Only we haven't yet."

Bilbo, Gandalf, and Frodo sighed in exasperation, while Merry whacked his cousin upside the head and Sam stuttered out an apology, enough of his meaning getting through to know that he was trying to excuse their behaviors by explaining that they didn't really know how to conduct themselves
around royalty and Pippin hadn't meant any insult.

"It's fine. You're my consort's family, and therefore mine. You may call me Thorin."

"Excellent."

Shaking his head over Pippin's response, Bilbo introduced Thorin to each of his boys in turn, Thorin shaking each of their hands in turn before he excused himself to acknowledge the humans and wizard who'd also arrived while Bilbo turned his attention to thinking out loud as he assured his hobbits that he would make sure they had quite the feast tonight, as they obviously hadn't been eating nearly enough and he'd made some headway in teaching the cooks here how to make hobbit food. And he'd oversee the preparations personally.

"I've been dreaming of a bowl full of the Took family chili for months now." Merry informed him mournfully, his eyes shining up a little at the mere thought of it.

"Well you know mine isn't as good as your grandmother's, but I can make some of your other favorites, Merry. And I have quite the entertaining story about your new cousins, Fili and Kili, and their attempt to try my version of the family chili. It did not end well." A chuckle. "And of course I wanted to hear all about your adventures as well."

"I'd much rather hear the story of how you came to be the consort of a dwarf king, Uncle Bilbo." Frodo informed Bilbo before the others could start rhyming off all the foods they'd missed while they'd been away on their adventure, or the various thrills and perils they'd encountered along the way.

Glancing over the boys' shoulders in the direction of his husband, Bilbo beamed at Thorin when his dwarf turned his own head to meet his gaze.

"Well boys, it was a bit of a gamble, I'll admit. But the best one I've ever made."

The look Thorin sent in him turn made it clear that his husband agreed with him, one hundred percent.

The End

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