A King's Bond

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A King's Bond

by mordelle

Summary

King Thorin felt like Mahal Himself had swung his mighty hammer and cracked it right between his dazed blue eyes. The vibrations from The Strike shook his very being from his skull to his heart and then out through every nerve in his body. His eyes rolled back, his lungs expelled every breath of air, and the King Under the Mountain swooned so violently that his chair tipped backward with a loud crash, leaving everyone in the room silently gaping at the head of the table where only a pair of royal boots could be seen. His One had finally returned his Call.

Notes

This is my first Bagginshield fic. I'm still coming to terms with that lol. Anyway, I had an original idea that I thought would fit this fandom and then it took on a life of it's own. It's nowhere near the original idea but I'm happy with it. The story is nearly complete and I think it will be 10 or 11 chapters. I am currently writing chapter 10.

I want to thank Danypooh80 for betaing and keeping me excited about writing!
I hope you enjoy the story!

Chapter 1

The day had started normally enough for the King Under the Mountain. King Thorin had no cause to think that his life would take a dramatic turn–none at all. The usual stressors of being a monarch may have affected his sleep, but that came with the job. The bags under his eyes were basically a permanent feature since his coronation, and that had been sixty years ago. Thorin's temples pulsed with an impending headache, but that was normal too. All dwarves who had not found their Ones were prone to them occasionally, their minds ever seeking out a connection they longed for–like a beacon trying to call them home. All dwarves had Ones and they felt their longing keenly, especially if they had been found and then lost. Most didn't survive long after their One's passing into Mahal's Halls. But that was thankfully not Thorin's case. In fact, he wondered if he would ever have a One. It was not unheard of for dwarves to stay unattached, it was about a fifty-fifty chance. But those who didn't have One's had Callings and would find their peace of mind in mastering their chosen craft.

Thorin tried to alleviate his longing by finding a craft, but after taking several apprenticeships, it was obvious he had no true Calling. Still, he mastered what he could to keep himself from brooding too badly. Sometimes, it was merely distance that separated Ones, and many festivals were held across the lands for those still seeking. Other times it was merely time that kept their unions at bay, as their One may not have been born yet. Thorin's advisors had thought the latter was the reason Thorin was still unbonded. But Thorin had his doubts. He was fifty years shy of two hundred, after all. No one had heard of having to wait more than a handful of decades for their other half to come into the world. And it was impossible for dwarrows to not sense it when their One took their first breath because it was said to be such an overwhelming feeling that it would send them into a dead faint.

One hundred and fifty years of walking alone in the world had left Thorin especially ill prepared for this day. Because on this seemingly ordinary day, while the council members bickered over trade deals and harvest festivals, King Thorin felt like Mahal Himself had swung his mighty hammer and cracked it right between his dazed blue eyes. The vibrations from The Strike shook his very being from his skull to his heart and then out through every nerve in his body. His eyes rolled back, his lungs expelled every breath of air, and the King Under the Mountain swooned so violently that his chair tipped backward with a loud crash, leaving everyone in the room silently gaping at the head of the table where only a pair of royal boots could be seen.

Thorin's eyes fluttered open and a collective breath was exhaled above him.

"Thank Mahal!"

"Your Majesty, are you well?"

"Ye scared the shite out of me!"

"Thought you'd been assassinated right before our very eyes!"

“Was it poison?”

“Nay, laddie, I think we all know what just happened.”

“What just happened?”

“...”

“... Oh. *OH!”*

“Oh-ho! Would ye look at that!”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen him smile like that.”

“Pft! I’ve never seen him *smile!”*

“Ha! He’s still cross eyed!”

There were cheers, laughter, praises and congratulations being shouted about but Thorin could not hear any of it. His brain was still vibrating and there was a tingling sensation crawling up and down his spine and into his fingertips and toes. It was like lightning in his veins, pure energy fizzing in his blood. He had to get up. He had to go!

“Woah, there, your Majesty! Not so fast!”

Thorin groaned as he tried to get up, but his body wasn’t listening.

“On the count of three!”

“Three!”

The world tilted and Thorin jolted forward, barely catching himself at the table’s edge with his hands. His face planted onto the stone table and he took in a breath only to let it out in a delighted laugh. And then he couldn’t stop laughing, which did nothing for his dizziness or the growing shock of his council. The tingling spread to his red cheeks and tips of his ears and nose. His One had finally returned his call.

“Balin,” Thorin breathed.

“Yes, my King.”

Thorin’s cheeks ached. “We must begin arrangements for travel, for my One calls me westward.”

In all the excitement of the moment, it wasn’t realized until much later there could be cause for worry. But the news had already begun to spread and the people of Erebor were taking to the city streets to celebrate the wonderful news. Thorin had never felt so alive and full of

hope. He had no idea how long he'd been musing, trapped in his own mind, wondering about his One.

Would they be male or female? What color were their eyes, or hair? Would they enjoy the same things and share common interests? These were all things Thorin had tried not to dwell on before but could not help himself, but now, *now* he could wonder as much as he liked because his One was no longer a wisp of his imagination, no! His One *existed* in the here and now! He *needed* to find them as quickly as possible! He needed his questions answered! He needed to be near his One and– *Oh, Mahal,* his One needed *him* ! If he didn't get to his One, they could begin to Fade because of the separation! Clearly they were not in Erebor, the call came from the far west. The Blue Mountains were in that direction, where his sister and nephews resided. He needed to send a message to his sister!

But before Thorin could even begin to plan for his travels, Balin and Dwalin finally plucked him from his incessant pacing and forced him to sit in his arm chair by the fire.

"Thorin," Dwalin said, a too somber expression on his face for the joyous occasion. "I think we need to discuss some… *concerns."*

"Aye, laddie," Balin agreed and he nodded, also too serious for Thorin's liking.

Thorin looked at each brother and shrugged. "What concerns?"

The brothers gave each other a knowing glance before Balin cleared his throat. "Well, we're happy for ye, of course, but there might be… some things that you haven't considered."

Thorin raised his eyebrows expectantly. "Like?"

"Death," Dwalin said with no fanfare.

Balin nearly choked in surprise while Thorin paled.

"What do you mean, *death* ?!" Thorin nearly roared as he jumped out of his seat. Was his One in danger? Did they know something he didn't?

Balin smacked his brother over the back of the head before they both manhandled the King back into his chair.

"Calm down," Balin soothed. "What my dear brother *meant,* " he sent a quick glare to Dwalin, "is that you're quite a bit older than your One if we assume correctly that they have just come into the world."

"Aye, a hundred and fifty years older," added Dwalin.

Thorin sighed in relief. "What of it? I don't care. I can wait another fifty years until they mature and more than that if they are not ready–just like everyone else."

"And that is right and noble," Balin said.

Dwalin scoffed. “By then ye’ll be two hundred years old, Thorin. Ye’ll live maybe another half century or so and then you’ll be in yer grave!”

“Dwalin!” Balin warned.

But Dwalin continued. “And yer one along with ye, most like.”

Balin nearly growled. “That’s not to say it *will* happen. Some dwarrow survive–”

“Mostly dams with children,” Dwalin plowed on. “They hang on alright, like yer sister has, but–”

Thorin held up a silencing hand, and he sighed. “These thoughts are not new to me. I cannot say I have not thought Mahal cruel to give me such little time with my One and my One an even shorter life than most. But…” he smiled wistfully, “I cannot find it in me to be saddened on this day. It is possible our relationship may not develop into something romantic in nature, anyway.”

Balin straightened and smiled back. “That is true.”

“Tis happened before…” Dwalin muttered, still seeming unsure. “But a bond is a bond. Lover or friend, they will suffer your loss keenly.”

Thorin nodded. “Or I might suffer theirs. And, yet, I cannot find it in me to worry over such things anymore.” His dopey grin must have resurfaced because the brothers smirked and chuckled. “What other choice is there, anyway? The Fade will take us both if I do not find them in time.”

Dwalin grunted. “Fuck, that’s true!”

“Indeed,” replied Balin. “So, do ye think they are in the Blue Mountains? We can send word to Dis. She can begin plans for a Finding festival and notify the families of all the bairns born this day.”

Thorin nodded. “My thoughts exactly.”

And as happy and eager as Thorin was, something niggled in the back of his mind. It was a slightly unpleasant feeling so it had no room to dwell in his newly delighted heart. But somewhere, deep down, he knew the Blue Mountains did not hold his One.

Because his One was no child of stone, but a child of the kindly west.

A child not of Mahal, but of Yavanna.

A Hobbit.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

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Something was not right.

Pausing on the East Road, Thorin's eyes looked west, then east, and north, and his confusion only grew. The Call was clear, and it was beckoning him off the road.

"Balin," Thorin called.

The old dwarf trotted to his side on his pony. "We'll be moving in a moment, not to worry."

Thorin shook his head. "Where are we?"

"Ah," Balin unraveled the map. "We're still in The Shire."

Thorin shivered at the news but could not understand why. "What path do we take next?" He looked to the south again.

"Continuing west, north-west. That will lead us straight to Ered Luin–"

"No." Thorin tore his eyes away from the direction of The Call to look Balin in the eye. "They are not there."

"What?"

"My One is not in Ered Luin."

Balin's brow furrowed. He looked down at the map and then back to Thorin. "But ye said the Blue Mountains–"

"I said westward." Thorin nudged his pony to turn. He looked out into the rolling green hills afar. *There.* "They are close. I sense we have arrived at a junction. In fact, I feel like we may have gone too far. We must go back." He pointed in the direction they must take. "What lies over there?"

“Close, ye say?” Balin drew closer and muttered as he read the map again. “Hm. That would be Hobbiton.”

Thorin shivered again. “That is where I am Called.” He wanted to charge through those hills, the road be damned. He was so *close* !

“But, Thorin,” Balin said, “that’s not but a town of Halflings. Everyone awaits our arrival in Ered Luin…”

“Are you saying I should just ignore my One’s Call?” Thorin snapped.

“No, of course not. It’s just, it would be strange if we stopped here and made camp. We don’t want to stir up any trouble. These Halflings are suspicious folk and rely on Rangers, and we have a small army with us. It would be best to continue on and meet your sister. The Finding Festival is only a month away–”

“But they are not in Ered Luin!”

“But they would be on their way there,” Balin reasoned. “We don’t know where they are traveling from, but traveling with a bairn is no small feat. They must be staying somewhere in town.”

Thorin shook his head. “I cannot leave them, not when they are so close!”

Balin threw his hands up. “What do ye propose we do, then? There are rules we must follow, lad! You can’t just barge in on the family with no notice and demand to see the bairn. You’re a king! If you don’t uphold our traditions, who will?”

A frustrated growl escaped the king as he closed his eyes and held back insults. Balin was right, of course. He sighed, trying his best to calm his racing heart. “Make certain that the Finding Festival is known throughout this region. Nail it on every door if possible.”

Balin nodded. “It shall be done, my King.”

Thorin grunted. With an ache in his chest, he turned away from the Call and continued in his procession to the Blue Mountains.

Thorin rejoiced in the company of his sister and nephews, but his thoughts were clouded. They had finally arrived in Ered Luin and the festivities had begun, but Thorin could not shake his restlessness or ever-growing brooding. His One had not arrived, had not even come closer. Every time Thorin closed his eyes, he saw green hills. A familiar pressure formed at his temples, though there was still no pain.

“Don’t worry, Thorin,” Dis soothed with a pat to his shoulder. “They will come.”

Thorin sighed. “There is only a week left…”

“Plenty of time. The Shire is only a few days' ride.”

“And if they do not come?”

Dis smiled. “Then we will go to them. We will find the family and summon them.”

Thorin nodded.

They did not come.

And when every dwarf in The Shire had been summoned, Thorin’s One was still rooted where he’d felt them last. In the end, there had been no choice but for the King to go himself to point out the exact location. But when Thorin arrived, he circled round twice in an anxious panic before he finally had the nerve to nod his head in the direction of a green door.

“Are ye certain?” Balin asked again.

“Yes,” Thorin breathed. He had never been more certain of anything in his life. His blood pounded in his ears, his hands sweated, and his breath came shallow. Now that the time had come, he didn’t feel ready to face this. Something was clearly wrong. They’d been told this was no dwarf’s home. This was a Hobbit hole, that housed a family of Hobbits. Why was his One here?

Balin cleared his throat. “I’ll go and inquire. You should go back to the inn.”

“No.”

“Worth a shot.” Balin pulled back his hood and walked up to the door with only a short glance back at Thorin before he knocked.

When the door opened, Thorin felt faint. A well-dressed Hobbit with spectacles greeted Balin. Thorin couldn’t hear what was said, but after a few words, both dwarf and Hobbit looked at Thorin, who nodded his head in greeting but made no move to approach. He had to stay put or he would ruin everything. It was all he could do not to sprint up to the door and knock the Halfling back to search the place himself. What if his One had been kidnapped by these people? Thorin reigned in his worst thoughts and tried to breathe through his apprehension.

“Thorin.”

The King’s eyes snapped open to see Balin with a tight smile. “What happened? What did he say?” Balin reached for his arm but Thorin flinched back. “Something is wrong. What is it?”

“Nothing, nothing is wrong…”

“Do not lie to me! Please, Balin!” The desperation in his voice could not be curbed.

“Laddie, there is nothing wrong. The bairn was born healthy and hale…”

Thorin waited– it was clear there was more. “But?”

Balin nodded slowly and drew closer. “Well, it’s–he’s–”

“He?” Thorin smiled, temporarily forgetting his unease at finding out something concrete about his One.

“Yes, *he* , is not, erm, well, he’s not–”

“ *What* ?!” Thorin wanted to shake the old dwarf.

“He’s a hobbit.” Balin coughed. “The bairn is a hobbit. I have an appointment with the father tomorrow at tea time–”

But Thorin did not hear the rest. His eyes were glued to a small feminine figure carrying the smallest baby Thorin had ever seen. She was walking toward them with a curious smile and when the tiny creature in her arms locked eyes with the King, the little one let out a delighted squeal that threatened to kill Thorin on the spot.

He didn’t die, but he did faint… again.

“So, it appears things are done quite differently around here,” Balin explained. “Apparently, erm, Hobbits don’t have Ones. Not to say that he isn’t yer One, of course. It’s plain he is after ye keeled over when ye sighted him yesterday. And, well, his father was *quite* upset with the news. Understandably so, since they have no concept of soul bonds outside what they know of fairy tales. This is unprecedented, but, ha, well, you won’t believe this, but, it seems that same sex unions are *frowned* upon here. Mr. Baggins was… hm… furious, really, for claiming his son was, in his own words, unnatural! Nearly kicked me out the door himself. Of course, after I explained our culture a bit, he seemed at least *thoughtful* if still *uncomfortable* . His wife was more reasonable. She apparently knows a bit more about dwarrow culture. Oh, and the bairn is the most *adorable* thing I’ve ever seen. You know, they call their young faunts! A little fauntling. Smallest babe I’ve ever held in my life! Nearly died of cuteness!”

“Balin, brother, would ye shut your hole for a moment?” Dwalin growled out. “Thorin looks like he’s about to lose his lunch.”

“Oh! Sorry, lad.”

Dwalin shook his king when he said nothing. “Thorin. Cousin.” He snapped his fingers in front of Thorin’s eyes and finally the king blinked.

Thorin took in a slow breath. His mind was whirling with the news and he couldn’t make sense of any of it. “What do I do?” He whispered. He looked to Balin and cleared his throat before speaking at what he hoped was a normal volume. “Are they against the bond?”

Balin shook his head. “They wanted time to digest the information. It is a lot to take in, after all.”

Thorin nodded stiffly. “If they refuse?”

Dwalin scoffed. “Then ye wait fifty years anyway. Yer One will come to ye.”

“Thirty-three,” Balin corrected haltingly. “Hobbits come of age at thirty-three…”

Both Dwalin and Thorin reared back. “So young?”

Balin pursed his lips before explaining. “The average lifespan of a Hobbit is about a hundred years.”

Dwalin nearly choked. “So little! But then–” he looked at Thorin.

Thorin laughed bitterly. “We will age at the same rate after a point.”

Balin hummed in agreement while Dwalin scratched at his bald head. “I guess…”

He wanted to be bitter about it, but after seeing his One and hearing that joyous squeal, Thorin could only smirk. “I will have faith in Mahal, whatever the Baggins’ decide. Balin?”

“Yes, Thorin?”

“What is his name?”

“Ah, his name is Bilbo.”

Thorin smiled. “Bilbo.”

Mr. and Mrs. Baggins had quite the disagreement that evening. Bungo never wanted to see another dwarf again and vowed to do everything possible to keep his son away from their greedy hands. Belladonna, on the other hand, reminded her husband that heartsongs could not be ignored forever. Yes, such a thing was mostly myth now, but she believed in the old stories of the Tooks before her, and she believed in her own story. Because even though Bungo could drive her to frustration, Belladonna heard her heartsong in him. Her husband was just too much of a Baggins to notice it properly, and she was fine with that.

In the end, they reached a compromise.

Bilbo would have to discover his heartsong for himself, as it should be, without the knowledge of a certain dwarf. His status as King Thorin’s One would be kept secret, even from Bilbo. Bilbo would live a normal Hobbit life in The Shire until his thirty-third birthday, when a certain dwarf promised to return, and Bilbo would be allowed to court whoever he pleased, regardless of race or gender. And if, in the end, he chose a dwarf who claimed he was his One, then Bungo would just have to eat it whole with no tea to wash it down.

Bungo, reluctantly, agreed.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Bilbo throughout the years...

Chapter Notes

Some homophobic/prejudice remarks that Belladonna stamps out right away.

“Biwd!”

Belladonna smiled down at her baby boy. “That’s right, Bilbo. That’s a bird!”

And what an interesting bird it was. A huge black raven with intelligent eyes was perched on the fence, peering down at the faunt who sat contentedly in the garden. It was not the first time the raven had made an appearance. It seemed intrigued by the fauntling, landing closer and closer each time it flew to greet them.

“Biwd!” Bilbo squealed and pointed.

“ *Roac!* ” cried the raven.

“Biwd!”

“ *Roac!* ”

“Biwd!”

The raven puffed out its feathers and flapped its wings in apparent irritation. “Roac, my *name* is Roac!” Then it flew away with an irritated caw.

Belladonna blinked. “That bird just spoke…”

“Mama! *MAMA* !”

Belladonna rushed to her fauntling’s room, nearly tripping over her skirts. Her poor baby sounded so distressed. “Bilbo! What is it, sweetling? What’s wrong?” She picked up a sniffling Bilbo and kissed his curls until he stopped crying.

“The dwaf-ses, mama!”

“What?”

“The dwaf-ses gonna get me! They take me away!”

Belladonna’s blood ran cold. Did her poor boy have a nightmare about a dwarf stealing him away? Was the bond doing this to her sweet child? “What do you mean, my love? Who said they would take you away?”

“Papa! Papa said meanie dwaf-ses with dirty mittens will steal me! I don wanna be stealed, mama! I miss you!”

Belladonna gave Bilbo the sweetest, most reassuring smile she could manage. “Oh, my darling. No one is going to steal you away from me,” she cooed. “I promise. Dwarves cherish and protect children, they have so few. They would never steal them–especially not from me! You have to stop asking papa for scary stories before bedtime, okay?”

Bilbo sniffed and nodded as his eyes drooped. Mother tucked her child in again for the night. She smiled wistfully at her son for another moment before she tip-toed out of his room and gently closed the door.

Then she whirled around, skirts billowing in the dark as she charged through the smial.

“ *BUNGO* BAGGINS!”

“Mama?” Bilbo asked with a curious tilt of his head. “It’s my birthday today?”

“Yes, darling.”

He pursed his little lips and scratched at his head. “But I got a present.”

Belladonna nodded and held out the wrapped gift for her son. “Indeed you did. Go on, take it.” She wondered when he’d catch on to the oddity. He’d just turned six. Five years of receiving a present on his birthday from a stranger, and he’d never asked about it. But he was growing up so fast and he was so intelligent.

“But I thought I was supposed to *give* presents on my birthday, not *get* them.” Still, Bilbo’s eyes gleamed as he took his gift with both hands. He gave it a little shake and something knocked around within. His eyes widened as he tore through the wrapping.

Belladonna laughed. “That is true, darling, and you will give presents today. But this is from a friend from far away. Where he’s from, they *get* presents on their birthday.”

“ *Wow* !” Bilbo reached inside the box and pulled out an impressive wooden toy. “It’s a dragon! Look!”

“I see! You’ll have to give him a mighty name!”

“I will!” Bilbo ran off with his new favorite toy, roaring and giggling.

Bungo came around the corner and huffed in annoyance as he lit his pipe. “I don’t like it, Bella. I don’t like it at all!”

Belladonna rolled her eyes. “So you’ve said every year.”

“ *He’s* cheating! We agreed that he’d stay away until–well, you know the terms! Trying to groom our son, I say! It’s not right.”

Belladonna walked up to her husband and swatted his arm. “Lower your voice. Bilbo doesn’t even know who it’s from. He’s never put a name or missive.”

“We should throw it away,” Bungo grumbled, puffing away like a chimney.

“Oh, yes,” replied Belladonna, very unimpressed. “I don’t see you throwing away your new pipe that *he* sent you on *your* birthday!” She flicked his pipe, sending ash into Bungo’s face, making him cough and splutter.

A blush tinged Bungo’s cheeks as he cleared his throat and wiped at his face with his handkerchief. “Well, ahem, no reason to throw out such a fine piece of craftsmanship,” he muttered as he tucked his tail between his legs and puttered away.

Bungo was eating his wife’s famous seed cake when his son skipped into the dining room.

“Papa?”

He looked at his son briefly. “Yes, my boy?” he replied and then took a large bite out of his favorite cake.

“Can two boy Hobbits kiss on the lips?”

The tasty morsel went down the wrong hole. Bungo beat his chest as he tried to swallow and breathe. “You said that *only mama’s* and *papa’s* are allowed to do that.” Bilbo frowned at his father and put his hands on his hips. “But Bosco said that any hobbit can kiss whoever they want, even if it’s two lads! Is this true?”

Bungo held up a finger and reached for his tea with his other hand as he wheezed. Once the lump that was cake finally slid down his tight throat, Bungo inhaled and began to educate his son.

“Well, my boy–” And then he nearly choked again when the sight of his wife seemed to float ominously around the kitchen entryway to stare at him from behind their son. “Eh…” He looked between the grave, hooded gaze of Belladonna and the innocent, curious eyes of Bilbo. “So, erm, it’s not *normal* –”

It seemed that Belladonna hadn’t moved and yet she was suddenly holding a frying pan with her arms crossed.

Bungo shivered. “What I mean to say is, it’s not, erm, *usual* for, erm, *lads* to k-kiss…”

Was that frying pan bigger than before?

“Not to say it isn’t allowed, mind! It’s just, in The *Shire* –” Belladonna narrowed her eyes, and Bungo dabbed at his sweaty forehead. “Yes, ahem, any Hobbit can, eh, kiss whoever they want as long as they both consent. And if anyone says otherwise, they are just narrow minded and old-fashioned.”

The oppressive shadow of Belladonna receded with her form as she went back to cleaning the kitchen.

“Oh,” said Bilbo. He seemed appeased and shrugged his shoulders. “That’s good. Lobelia kissed me once.” His face looked like he’d just sucked on a lemon. “It was very wet and not very agreeable. Maybe kissing a lad would be better.” Then he ran off.

Bungo groaned.

In Bilbo’s opinion, kissing lads was not much better. It was very inconvenient to not like any of the other Hobbits like that. His friends and cousins seemed obsessed with kissing and *other* things. All the tween lasses talked about was who they wanted to marry and the lads kept falling in love with a new lass every day! And though both his parents confirmed it was okay for Hobbits to experiment with both sexes, it became very clear to Bilbo that not all were of the same opinion. It was expected to marry the opposite sex no matter what, and same sex unions weren’t talked about.

Bilbo didn’t want to marry anyone, lad or lass. He preferred reading and going on walking holidays with his parents. They never went too far, unfortunately. Bilbo always wanted to go further. The more they traveled, the further he wanted to go. He had an inexplicable urge to go east. But they never went further than Bree. Going to Bree was always an adventure. Sometimes they’d see elves along the way. There were plenty of men. On more than one occasion, there were dwarves.

His father was not a fan of dwarves even though he was more than civil and tried his best to keep his prejudices to himself, especially when his wife was around. So, even though Bilbo found himself intrigued with the race, he was somewhat wary. His father had to have a good reason for disliking them though he never spoke of it.

When Bilbo saw a small camp of them selling their wares, he gravitated towards them quietly. He caught sight of a stand that sold toys and immediately thought of purchasing some for his younger cousins. Pursuing through the toys, he noticed a small engraving on each piece that matched his dragon back home.

“That’s a crafter’s mark,” a dwarf beside him supplied.

Bilbo startled, wide eyes locking with the dwarf that had an impressive star-like hairstyle. “Oh. I-I have wooden dragon that I received as a gift once, when I was a fauntling. It has this exact mark. Um, Bilbo Baggins, at your service.” He gave a timid but polite bow.

The dwarf bowed back. “Nori, at yours. I know the mark and the dwarf personally. His name is Bofur.”

“Personally? Really?”

“Aye. Oi, Bifur!” He turned and yelled at a dwarf with an honest-to-goodness ax in his head. “Tell your cousin he has a fan waiting for him!”

Bilbo gasped. “He’s here?!”

Nori nodded and chuckled. “We are all traveling together from Erebor. We’ve come to settle in the Blue Mountains.”

“Alright, who wants my autograph?” A dwarf with a large funny hat nearly skipped towards them.

Bilbo was introduced and happily told Bofur about his toy dragon, Smaug.

“Really?” asked Bofur, scratching at his beard. “This is my first time here. I would never have imagined one of mine ending up in Hobbiton, of all places! When did you say you got it? And who sent it?”

Bilbo was brought up short as he had no memory of who sent it. “I got it about fourteen years ago. It sort of looks like that one, but much bigger and red.”

Bofur looked at the tiny green dragon in the stall. “Hm… I was commissioned for a piece like that. Timing seems right.” Then his eyes went wide. “King Thorin commissioned it from me himself! I never made another like it! I thought it was for one of his nephews. How– *OH* !”

Bilbo shuddered violently, though he was not cold. “K-king?!”

Nori punched Bofur in the arm and hissed something in Khuzdul. Bofur’s eyes widened even more as the dwarves had a small argument until Bofur chuckled nervously.

“I must have made another one without realizing it! What a coincidence! Well! Nice meetin’ ye! Very busy, me! Lots of fans to attend!” Then he raced off.

From then on, Bilbo felt dwarven eyes on him throughout his entire stay at the market and he couldn’t shake the odd encounter from his mind. His mother had given him the toy, surely. But if he recalled correctly, she said it had been from a friend from far away. It couldn’t have been as far as Erebor, could it?

Wait . There were other gifts throughout the years, each of dwarven make–each with a crafter mark! Bilbo tried to discreetly search the other stalls. Leather journals of fine quality, a set of quills and ink bottles, translated books of dwarven history and fairytales, fabric, jewelry and weapons. He searched them all for their marks and came across a few more he recognized from presents he and his parents had received.

The entire camp was from Erebor. Who could his mother possibly know there? Why hadn’t she said her friend was a dwarf? Why had she never mentioned them? And more importantly,

why was this person sending them all gifts every year without fail?

Strange. Very strange indeed.

Bilbo rubbed at his chest absentmindedly as he tried puzzling out the information. After that day, there was a stronger longing to go forth on an adventure… to go east.

Belladonna was tending her tomatoes when a large black raven landed on her head. She yelped and fell on her bottom as she swatted the bird away.

“Roac, for goodness sake! What have I told you about manners? Why can’t you spy for your king without causing a fuss?”

The raven perched itself on her knee and bowed its head sheepishly. “Urgent!”

Belladonna huffed and crossed her arms. “Out with it then.”

Roac’s feather ruffled at the command. “The King is Fading! The King under the mountain has begun to Fade!”

The hobbit lass gasped. “Oh no!”

The raven jumped with agitation. “Does the One fade too? Urgent! Must take news back to the Blue Mountains!”

“What? No!” But Belladonna was riddled with fear as she sprang up suddenly, dislodging Roac with a squawk, and raced into the smial. “Bilbo! Bilbo!”

Her son rushed out of the kitchen to meet her. “What is it, mama?! Are you all right?”

Belladonna cupped Bilbo’s face and searched his eyes, felt his forehead, and patted him down as if searching for injuries. “Are you okay? Do you feel sick at all?” What was she supposed to look for? What were the signs of Fading? “How do you feel?”

“I’m fine, I feel fine! What happened?” Other than slight concern in his eyes for his mother, Bilbo seemed fine.

Belladonna let out the air that had been trapped in her lungs. “Oh goodness,” she panted. “Are you certain, you feel fine? Don’t feel strange at all?”

Bilbo’s nose twitched thoughtfully. “I think I’m okay… but…”

She froze, crouching down only a little to meet her son’s eyes. “But what?” She asked as calmly as she could. “Tell me. Anything odd at all?”

“Um,” Bilbo began to fidget. “I guess I haven’t been sleeping too well.”

That didn’t seem so bad. Her son was excitable and adventurous, as restless as she was when she was a tween. “Well, reading all night will do that! I’ve told you you need proper rest.”

Bilbo nodded but grimaced as he shrugged his shoulders. “It’s just… I *am* tired but I can’t seem to sleep. My thoughts can’t seem to stop, so I read.”

Taking a closer look, Belladonna did notice the small bags under his eyes and the beginnings of dark circles. And was he a bit pale too? “Right,” she breathed, trying to calm her racing heart and make it seem like all was right in the world. “I’ll make you some chamomile tea tonight to see if that helps. All right?”

“Okay.”

“Why don’t you take a nice, warm bath. Take your time and relax.” Bilbo smiled at her and nodded before walking away to follow her instructions. Once she heard the bathroom door close, Belladonna rushed to her husband’s study and pulled out pen and parchment.

A tapping grabbed her attention and she saw Roac at the window. She opened it.

“Tell your King that Bilbo is well–save for some trouble sleeping. Tell him to send me a list of symptoms of Fading so that I may know what to look for. I will be taking Bilbo to an old friend in Rivendell, as soon as possible. Go now!”

Roac cawed and quickly took flight.

It was time for Belladonna’s Tookish side to take over. She opened her chest of forgotten treasures from former adventures and pulled out her favorite traveling bag. She hoped this journey would prove fruitful for her son, and prayed that the King Under the Mountain could wait just a bit longer.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Bilbo followed the music, entranced by the haunting melody.
There, sunlit and sitting alone was a man–no, a dwarf, playing an elven harp of gold.

Chapter Notes

Wondering how smutty chapter 10 should be…

Thank you all so much for all the comments and kudos! This is really exciting! I'll still be posting daily as long as nothing gets in my way of that.

Bilbo knew something was wrong with him, but that feeling had been with him since he could remember. Something was missing. A yawning hole inside that urged him to search for… something. He didn't think it was an illness, but Lord Elrond, as vague as he tended to be, seemed to treat whatever was wrong with Bilbo as such.

The healer touched Bilbo's temples. "How old are you now?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Hmm. Not long now before you're coming of age."

Bilbo arched his brow. "Have someone you wish to pair me off with as well?"

Lord Elrond chuckled. "Is that something frequently on your mind?"

Bilbo huffed in mild annoyance. "How could it not? When everyone can't seem to talk of anything else, but who they are going to marry or how many fauntlings they plan to have!"

"Surely not everyone. Your parents?"

"My father is always asking if I've found a lass yet."

Lord Elrond seemed surprised by the news. "And your mother?"

Bilbo shrugged. "I suppose she's the only one not badgering me about it. But I can tell she's worried… about something."

“It’s normal for a Hobbit your age to start thinking of marriage prospects.”

Shaking his head, Bilbo slumped in his seat. “I have no desire for such things. I can barely stand it when others touch me.”

Lord Elrond hummed thoughtfully. “An aversion to touch by anyone?”

“Anyone with ulterior motives.” Bilbo narrowed his eyes at the healer who only smiled and shook his head as he let go of him.

So far, the only symptoms of whatever Bilbo had were restlessness, strange dreams, and lack of proper sleep. He felt quite tired most mornings, as if he’d been running after something all night and never reaching whatever he sought. It was advised to return to Rivendell once a year, and Bilbo had to admit that being in the last homely house did wonders for his spirits. It was the furthest he’d been from the Shire and it was just so different than anything he’d ever seen. It soothed something deep and aching but did not cure it.

On one particular visit, Bilbo felt a shift in the air itself. Upon waking, he felt invigorated and eager to dash out and explore everything. He walked through the gardens when the sound of a harp filled his delicate ears. He followed the music, entranced by the haunting melody.

There, sunlit and sitting alone was a man–no, a *dwarf* , playing an elven harp of gold. His eyes were covered by a blindfold, the harp resting against his shoulder as he plucked silver-white strings. Every note enchanted Bilbo more, and he drew closer. He noticed the dwarf had covered eyes, a short beard, shorter than most dwarves Bilbo had come across. He was handsome, with his hair in two braids on either side of his head to keep black and gray tresses from his face. Bilbo hadn’t realized how close he’d approached the beautiful stranger until he noticed that the blindfold was sheer enough to see the dwarf’s eyes were closed behind it. He assumed the dwarf was blind but of somewhat noble status, for he wore a finely made blue tunic with golden runes as trimming. His hands appeared rough but his nails were clean. He had light wrinkles on his forehead from age and the concentration he placed in his music.

The music ended and barely visible eyes fluttered open under thin fabric to meet Bilbo’s, and what Bilbo wanted in that moment was to know what color those eyes were.

“Hello,” rumbled a deep, but gentle voice from the dwarf.

The sound of his voice was like nothing Bilbo had ever heard. It was smooth and thick like raw honey pouring into Bilbo’s mind, slowing his thoughts and sticking his tongue to the roof of his mouth.

The dwarf was quiet for a moment before speaking again. “May I be of service, Master…?”

Yes, thought Bilbo, *you can keep talking. Talk forever.* Bilbo tried to shake off his sudden daze and odd thoughts. “Oh, erm, sorry about that!” *How embarrassing! He caught me gawking, and it’s obvious he’s not as blind as I assumed!* “Sorry, can you see me?” As soon as the words left his mouth, Bilbo wished for the first time to wear shoes so he could stick it in his own pie hole. *How rude!*

Before he could apologize, the dwarf let out an amused breathy laugh. “You’re very forward, Master Hobbit. I am not completely blind, though I near it soon, I’m afraid. The covering is for the benefit of others. My eyes… draw pitying looks that I am not fond of. Still, I’d like to continue to see the world for as long as I’m able. Hence,” the dwarf mounted to his eye coverings.

Bilbo nodded, wondering if he’d been hypnotized by the dwarfs' voice again because although he heard every word, the delay in understanding them seemed like ages. “Ah, I see. Pardon my… forwardness.”

The dwarf smirked. “You are pardoned…”

There was a long awkward pause before the dwarf’s brow raised expectantly. Bilbo spluttered and sent a hand to a flaming cheek. “Oh! Bilbo! I’m Bilbo Baggins. At your service!” He bowed quickly and grabbed his fingers behind his back, which only made him feel exposed so he brought his hands forward and wrung them for a moment before slapping them to his sides to stop fidgeting.

A rumbling chuckle made Bilbo blush hotter, the tips of his ears burning along with his entire face. He was happy for the stranger’s eye covering now. “I am Thorin Oakenshield.” He bowed his head slightly and grinned, nearly blinding Bilbo with its brilliance. “At your service.”

“Oh, my,” Bilbo breathed, then cleared his throat nervously. The name felt familiar, but the thought soon flew away along with whatever was left of his common sense. *What is wrong with me?* “You-you play beautifully. I couldn’t help but follow the music here. I hope I’m not intruding.”

Thorin shook his head. “You are not, Master Baggins–”

“Oh, just Bilbo, please.” *Please-please-please.*

“Well, *Bilbo* ,” Thorin said softly, lancing a spear of glee through Bilbo’s heart, “you are kind to say so. My teacher would disagree, but thank you all the same.”

Bilbo scoffed with incredulity. “I don’t see how anyone would say otherwise when faced with the allurement of such deft and bewitching playing!” Bilbo let out a surprised squeak at hearing his own words. Thorin’s mouth fell open and his partially hidden eyes widened comically.

For the sake of all that is green, Bilbo Baggins, sew your lips together!

The Hobbit suddenly found the hair on his feet exceedingly interesting. “Eh…”

“You honor me,” Thorin murmured. “Since you enjoy it so much, I’d be glad to play for you again.”

Bilbo snapped his gaze up to Thorin’s and smiled wide. “That would be lovely! Yes!”

Thorin motioned for him to sit beside him on the stone bench. The Hobbit was helpless once situated, when he noticed how much larger the dwarf was compared to himself. He wondered how tall the dwarf would be standing in comparison and shivered at the thought. Bilbo tried to concentrate on Thorin's dexterous fingers, but the blood in his cheeks threatened to go much further south than necessary, so he focussed on Thorin's profile, which wasn't much better. Still, he could not help but be completely riveted to Thorin's strong graceful countenance. He'd never found anyone so beautiful before.

Thorin finished his piece and Bilbo let a quiet moment pass. "That was positively lovely."

Thorin inclined his head in thanks and smiled. "Had I such an avid audience in my youth, I would have truly mastered the instrument. I would have certainly saved myself the pain from my teacher's smacks to my poor head for being such a disappointment."

Bilbo laughed. "Well, you're still a master in my eyes. I don't play anything. I can sing decently enough, but that's about it."

"I would love to hear it." And that sentiment came out so sincere that Bilbo had to remind himself to breathe.

To his great dismay, Bilbo giggled nervously. "So! What brings you to Rivendell, Master Oakenshield."

"I must insist you call me Thorin if I am to call you Bilbo."

At the sound of his name again, Bilbo shuddered. Softly, he repeated his inquiry. "What, uh, what brings you to Rivendell… Thorin?" *Oh, goodness.* Even saying the dwarfs name made him dizzy.

Maybe there was something physically wrong with him after all.

Thorin turned away slightly and stroked the edge of his harp. "Like most travelers to Imladris, I suppose, I came for healing."

Bilbo drooped, his constant smile finally fading. "Oh, for your eyes?" And confound it, why was he so nosy?

Thorin sighed and smiled wistfully. "No, Bilbo. My failing sight is a mere symptom of what ails me."

Chest feeling incredibly tight all of a sudden, Bilbo frowned. "I'm sorry. Where did you come from?"

"I hail from Erebor."

"Erebor?! So far!" The dwarf's condition must be dire indeed if he came from the Lonely Mountain to the *elves* of Rivendell for healing. He was incredibly saddened at the thought that Thorin was suffering something so great. And, yes, now that Bilbo could focus on the dwarf better, he could tell he was paler than he should be, his cheeks were a bit gaunt, and his hands had a slight shake to them. And yet he'd played for Bilbo!

“And what about you, Bilbo? I hope you are not gravely ill…?”

The question brought Bilbo out of his musings. He shook his head. “No, no. Nothing too dire. I’m fine for the most part… just… well, I don’t want to burden you with my silly symptoms. Truly there is nothing wrong with me, physically, at least.”

There was genuine relief in Thorin’s face. “So, is it a sickness of the heart?”

Bilbo scoffed. “I suppose that is what Lord Elrond would call it, though I have given my heart to no one.” Was that even more relief from the dwarf when he sighed?

“You need not give your heart to anyone to feel heartsick. All hearts seek one thing. Love. Whether it is to give or receive it, that is all it wishes. What do you love, Bilbo?”

The hobbit gaped a bit, stumped by the question. “I, well, I love… stories. Adventures. I think I’d love to make my own stories someday, from my own adventures.”

Thorin nodded and smirked. “Have you had many adventures?”

Bilbo furrowed his brow and looked to the ground. “No. Not any, really.”

“There you have it then,” Thorin replied gently. “You have denied yourself love, and so your heart yearns. Your cure might lie within your desires.”

“Are you encouraging a respectable hobbit of the Shire to be late for dinner on account of pursuits of–”

“Happiness? Fulfillment?” He shot Bilbo a teasing grin. “Absolutely.”

Bilbo’s mouth clicked shut. “Well, I–I’m not my own hobbit, yet.” His face flamed at confessing he was still under the care of his parents. “I will be soon!” He was quick to clarify. “Maybe then…”

“Maybe then.” Thorin whispered. “Well, I have an appointment with the healers.”

“Oh, of course! Here let me–” Bilbo jumped up to stand, and without thinking, grabbed Thorin’s hand to help him up. But as soon as their hands made contact, Bilbo’s vision went white and his lungs seized as he swooned.

“Bilbo!” His eyes fluttered open and landed on Thorin’s uncovered ones. The covering had slipped off the dwarf’s face, tucked under his chin. His eyes were blue, but clouded by murky film. *What a shame* , thought Bilbo, *they would be sure to match the color of clear skies.* And suddenly, he was filled with deep sorrow. Now he knew what ailed his new friend, and the knowledge hurt more than it probably should have. “Bilbo, are you all right?”

“Your Fading,” Bilbo whispered.

Thorin blinked in surprise then looked down to take his fabric in hand. He looked resigned at confirming it no longer protected his eyes. He met Bilbo’s gaze then and said, “Yes.”

Bilbo knew about the ailment. His parents didn't think he'd figured it out yet. They feared for their son and thought he was Fading. And though it was true that Bilbo felt an unquenchable longing, loneliness, and restlessness, he did not share other symptoms that Thorin clearly had. He knew about Ones too. He knew now that Thorin had a One and must have lost them somehow, and now he was dying. A small flame of hope died in Bilbo at the revelation. For what kind of hope? He did not truly know at the moment. But it felt like he had lost a chance of some kind. Why would he even have a chance to begin with?

Why would a seasoned, handsome, lordly dwarf look for anything in a small hobbit considered hardly more than an adolescent and with no first-hand knowledge of the real world?

"I'm so sorry, Thorin."

Thorin tutted and reached out, his fingers gently pushing back Bilbo's curls aside. A tingling sensation tickled his scalp at the light touch, and Bilbo lost his breath momentarily again. "I have lived a long life, Bilbo. I've had enough adventures to last me a lifetime. And I still have a ways to go." He smiled a devastating, crooked smile and winked. "I may outlive you yet, so do not weep before I am in the ground."

With that, Thorin stood and held out his hand for Bilbo to take. There was only a moment of hesitation before Bilbo took it. The contact was blissful torture, and it only lasted a second before Thorin pulled Bilbo's hand to his lips and kissed his knuckles. His knees didn't give in because his body decided it was completely paralyzed–head to foot. And Bilbo had been right, Thorin was tall for a dwarf–a full head or more taller than Bilbo. His knees finally gave a warning tremble when Thorin leaned down and whispered into his pointed ear.

"Safe travels on your adventures. I would like to hear of them someday. Until then, Bilbo."

"Until then," promised Bilbo with a shaky sigh.

Thorin left him there with only the harp and his thundering pulse for company. Or so he thought. Because only moments after Thorin disappeared, Lord Elrond's children emerged out of nowhere with amused grins.

"Well, that was *enlightening* ," said Elledan.

"I thought you had no desire for romance, Bilbo," added Elrohir.

Bilbo was brought back to his senses with a hot flush. "I-I don't!"

The twins chuckled. "Well, then, maybe you are due for an adventure," cried Elrohir.

"Your compass points north, after all!" Elledan laughed as the brothers gave Bilbo's trousers a pointed glance.

Bilbo looked down and gasped. "Confusticate and bebother my *short life!*"

He quickly turned around and ran while he covered the embarrassment sticking up under his trousers. Well, it was never too late to have a sexual awakening. *Better late than never* , he

supposed. He felt absolutely dreadful to hope that Thorin was blind enough to have missed his *dilemma* .

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> His One was searching for him, and it pained Thorin to evade him. He'd tried his best to keep away over the days, but he was not as alert or as quick as he used to be, and he was certain the elf twins were conspiring against him from how often their presence preceded Bilbo's. In the end, it hardly mattered. Thorin's willpower failed him every time eventually, and he'd let Bilbo find him.

Chapter Notes

> My new kitten is so dang adorable, I just had to share my love.
> I'm making slow progress with chapter 10, but still writing! Anything smutty takes me a while to write.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thorin tried to steer clear of his One after that encounter. It had to be enough because he knew he couldn't survive much more, no matter what the elf lord said. The healer assured that the distance had been doing more harm than good. It was only his failing willpower and the earnest pleas from Belladonna Baggins that Thorin finally acquiesced to meet them in Rivendell. His raven and spymaster had kept a watchful eye on his One, but seeing Bilbo healthy and hale did wonders for his worries. And he couldn't deny that his own health had benefited from the close contact.

Thorin had received small portraits of Bilbo over the years, one he kept secreted away in a locket near his heart, but none could ever come close to seeing him with his own eyes–as murky as his vision was. He wouldn't trade it for the world. Thorin still hoped to win Bilbo's heart in the near future, and if he were blind by the time that happened, he wouldn't care. It would be worth it. But Lord Elrond seemed to think the symptoms would reverse themselves with time and closeness.

Thorin felt proud of himself, for not only getting through the encounter without confessing to absolutely everything, but for encouraging Bilbo to seek out the adventures he so desperately wanted. Such things were dangerous, especially for someone so used to living a life of comfort and ease. It was a little underhanded, but Thorin had a solution in place to protect his One for when he finally ventured out. He could only hope that Bilbo wouldn't hold it against him if he ever found out.

"You're breathing easier," Lord Elrond said with slight smugness.

Thorin fought the urge to roll his failing eyes. “Our meetings are going well.”

“And have you thought more about what we discussed?”

Thorin nodded and sighed, defeated. “My cousin has taken his place as regent in my stead. My most trusted but foolish company has already settled in Ered Luin. I will meet them there when my presence is no longer needed here.”

“This was more for your benefit than for Bilbo’s, you realize. Settling in the Blue Mountains won’t be enough before long. You should consider staying in the Shire. I’m certain I can convince Mister Baggins, although he is undoubtedly in denial about his son’s destiny.”

Thorin grunted. He knew Bungo Baggins did not understand the bond. “It’s likely I’ll abdicate the throne,” he murmured. “After that, I might settle in Bree.”

“Thorin,” Lord Elrond warned.

“I know,” Thorin snapped. “I agreed to their terms, and I will not break my vow. This meeting is pushing it as is. But…” he slumped, tired from the small outburst of anger, “I will not let the Fade take me so easily. If the worst comes, I will… go to the Shire. At the very least, It is possible we could be good friends.”

Lord Elrond pursed his lips and nodded, but the elf looked dubious. “Very well.”

His One was searching for him, and it pained Thorin to evade him. He’d tried his best to keep away over the days, but he was not as alert or as quick as he used to be, and he was certain the elf twins were conspiring against him from how often their presence preceded Bilbo’s. In the end, it hardly mattered. Thorin’s willpower failed him every time eventually, and he’d let Bilbo find him.

They got along so well. Bilbo was an endless well of questions, asking about dwarven culture and history. Their race was an extremely secretive one, but Thorin answered as best he could. When Bilbo requested him to regale him with stories of his own adventures, Thorin would give as many details as possible without revealing who he really was, but it was difficult.

Sometimes, he’d offer to play the harp for Bilbo, and the poor hobbit would stammer and evade his gaze but agree with a smile. Then he’d endlessly praise him, which did much for Thorin’s usually bruised ego. They would walk together, eat together, and compare hobbit and dwarven customs.

To Thorin’s dismay (and delight), once Bilbo grew more comfortable in his presence, would try to touch Thorin as often as he could. Bilbo would hold his arm out on their walks together, or graze their fingers together when passing him something. He’d sit close so that their shoulders or thighs could press against one another.

It drove Thorin to near madness. He wanted to hold his One–just hold him. He could not deny that the budding closeness between them was healing his fractured spirit. Some days his

eyesight was good enough to memorize the precious details of his One's countenance.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end. It was Bilbo's last day in Rivendell, and Thorin had been debating whether he should let Bilbo find him to say goodbye. He didn't think his poor, battered heart could take it. Unless he ventured to Rivendell again next year, he probably wouldn't see the hobbit again until his coming-of-age celebration. And then Bilbo would most likely be inundated with marriage offers. Thorin would be older and probably ravished by the Fade, maybe even completely blind by then. How would he have a chance to capture Bilbo's heart?

Thorin felt two pairs of eyes on him. *Damn, meddling elves.* He couldn't pinpoint where the menaces were. It was too late to notice that the twin terrors had been caging him from either side in an empty hallway.

"Greetings, Master Dwarf," said one with cheer.

"It is lucky we have run into you," said the other.

Thorin scoffed, looking up at the tall figures, each in the eye. "Just because you're your father's children doesn't mean you can accost his patients at all hours," he scolded.

"Are we accosting you?" Thorin could never tell which was which, so he didn't bother trying to figure it out.

"We were only greeting you and wondering how you are feeling on this fine day."

He should have stayed in his room. It was too late. Thorin could sense Bilbo was close, and he resigned himself to his fate. "I know two meddlesome dwarrows who are just as conniving as you both," Thorin muttered just in time before Bilbo rounded the corner.

"Thorin!" Bilbo cried and waved enthusiastically before seeming to remember himself and subdue his outburst. Still, the hobbit's smile was radiant, and Thorin could not help but return it.

"Hello Bilbo," one brother said.

"Goodbye Bilbo," said the other.

And just like that, the twins left with matching grins.

Very subtle.

Bilbo cleared his throat and approached almost cautiously. "Well, that was odd. But those two have always been a bit strange. Probably a twin thing."

"Or an elf thing," he grumbled back.

Bilbo laughed, musical and light. “Ah, that’s right! Dwarves and elves don’t really get along, do they?”

Thorin nodded and placed his hands behind his back lest he be tempted to reach out for the smaller being. *Mahal* , but Bilbo was adorable. Those honey curls, wide hazel eyes, beardless face, and small stature just begged Thorin to envelop him in his arms for a snuggle. “How are you this day, Bilbo?”

The hobbit bounced on his bare heels but made no move to close the distance between them. “Much better! I find myself more rested of late. And yourself?”

Thorin took a few steps toward him, not resisting the pull his One had on him. “Being here has been a great help.”

Bilbo clapped his hand together, genuinely pleased. “That’s so good to hear! I’ve been wondering since we last spoke. I…” he flicked his eyes away nervously, “was hoping I’d get to speak with you again before...”

Looking through the sheer fabric, Thorin couldn’t be sure if Bilbo blushed, but the timid shuffle of his feet and nervous wringing of his hands hinted at it. “Then I’m glad you found me.” *Understatement.* “Anything in particular you wished to speak to me about?”

“Ah, well, yes.” Bilbo dragged his feet forward, bringing them even closer. The hobbit looked up in order to meet Thorin’s gaze. “Well, you mentioned you might like to hear about my, um, adventures–when I have them. I know that was probably you just being, um, pleasant–“

“I was very sincere,” Thorin cut in, hoping he sounded it.

Really, Bilbo had to be blushing with the way he kept averting his gaze. “Oh, that’s good. Good, good. Because I realized that, well, that I have no way of finding you again. It’s-it’s my last day here, you see. My mother and I will be going back to the Shire, where I’m from–as you already know. Have you ever been? I never asked!”

Thorin felt bad for letting him ramble, but he was riveted by the sound of Bilbo’s voice. “I have, once.”

Bilbo blinked in surprise. “Really?” Then smiled wide and Thorin’s poor heart picked up its pace. “I wish we would have met then!”

We did. “It was… almost thirty years ago.”

Bilbo’s smile lost its vibrance as his eyes shifted, thinking. “Oh.” His eyes traveled all over Thorin’s face, likely trying to gauge how old he was and, for some reason, finding it disappointing.

Thorin decided to change the subject to something safer. “I will be traveling to the Blue Mountains soon and staying there indefinitely with my sister and her sons.”

The hobbit's smile came back in full force. "That's not far from the Shire! Maybe my journey will lead me there someday. I've always wanted to go. In any case," Bilbo shoved a hand in his pocket and produced a small piece of parchment, "here. I go to Bree about once a week to collect the post and whatnot." The paper shook slightly as Bilbo handed it over. "I'll need a-a friend to show me around when I get to the Blue Mountains. If-if you're willing. And-and, I would love some advice from a seasoned traveler such as yourself. Maybe you can consider writing to me about your own adventures? I know you've yet to tell me all of them."

Thorin was careful not to touch him as he took the note. "Is it… proper for me to write to you?" Thorin already knew the answer. He wasn't allowed to write to Bilbo, that had been part of the terms. Bilbo did not know that, but he *did* know that receiving letters from marriage prospects was considered taboo until he was officially considered an adult.

Bilbo visibly paled. "What?"

Thorin played dumb. "It is improper for dwarves who are not relatives to write to another dwarf's children without prior consent."

Fear and anger filled Bilbo's eyes. "I-I–but…! I'm not a child! How old do you think I am?! I am no fauntling, Master Oakenshield!"

Thorin shrugged. "I didn't mean to insult you, my friend. You said you are not your own hobbit yet. A dwarf reaches maturity at fifty. Hobbits and dwarves have vastly different lifespans, as I have heard said."

Bilbo seemed to stare past Thorin, paralyzed. Thorin waited patiently for whatever it was Bilbo needed to process until Bilbo quietly asked, "How-how old *are* you?"

"A hundred and seventy-eight," he replied matter-of-factly.

The hobbit swayed back and Thorin almost reached out, but Bilbo caught himself with the wall behind him. "A hun…dred… and uh…" He swallowed audibly, and for a moment there was a look of pure despair before he made his expression blank. "That's… *wow* ."

Thorin didn't know what to do. For dwarves, Ones were sacred and not questioned. It was normal for Ones to be involved in each other's lives in some capacity even before they reached maturity–even if there was an age difference. Dwarves were never concerned with breeding since only a third of their race was female. They had no sexual inclinations until they fell in love with another, and even then, it was not uncommon for a pair to be more like friends than lovers. Was Bilbo disappointed that Thorin was so much older than he? Hobbit's were very different after all, closer to men in similarities when it came to marriages and breeding.

Bilbo cleared his throat and appeared even more timid than when they first met. "I apologize, Master Oakenshield," he said formally. "You've been very kind, indulging what you must consider a mere child these past days."

Thorin cringed. "No, Bilbo, please do not misunderstand–"

“It’s fine!” Bilbo nearly yelled, flapping his hands around in frantic dismissal. “I grossly underestimated our age difference. I thought you were in your forties and you say even *that* is considered a dwarfling!”

“Stripling, actually.”

“What?”

“What your kind might consider a tween, which I assume you are?”

Bilbo ducked his head and bit down a groan. “Yes,” he admitted in a growl. He shuffled his feet adorably. “And you’re right,” he murmured, “it would certainly raise some eyebrows if people found out I was receiving letters from a dwarf, let alone one so old.”

“Old?!” Thorin tried to seem insulted, but he merely barked out a laugh. “I’m still in my prime!”

A little glint of hope shone in Bilbo’s eyes. “That’s… that’s good to hear.” Bilbo bounced on his heels and bit down on his lip. “Would you still write to me?” He asked haltingly. “No one needs to find out…”

Thorin shook his head, and Bilbo instantly slumped and frowned, big eyes growing moist. He could not stand it. He rubbed at the ache in his chest and thought. “Perhaps,” Thorin said slowly as Bilbo’s pointed ears twitched, “I could address my letters to your parents–”

Bilbo clapped his hands loud and smiled hopefully. “Mother! Yes, my mother! That could work!” He glanced to the side at nothing and narrowed his eyes as he rubbed his hands together. “My mother would understand, I’m sure,” he murmured, more to himself than to Thorin.

Thorin chuckled. “It is settled then. I will write.”

Bilbo looked up to meet his covered eyes and grinned. “And I will write back,” he promised. There was an awkward moment of restraint from Bilbo until he finally flung himself at Thorin. The embrace knocked the air out of the king and Bilbo let go before he could return it properly. The hobbit practically coughed out his farewell and nearly ran.

Thorin stood there and watched the hasty retreat with a wistful smile and a hopeful, but shattering, heart.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the kudos and comments!
You can find me on tumblr or in instagram @mordellestories

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

After his last visit to Rivendell, something had shifted in Bilbo. Something about Thorin had shaken the ground on the world he lived in, like rock giants had taken residence in his very being and started a battle.

Chapter Notes

A little angst...

I really didn't think I'd get this many kudos so quickly for this. I am but spec in an ocean of Bagginshield fics! So thank you SO much for the support!

After his last visit to Rivendell, something had shifted in Bilbo. Something about Thorin had shaken the ground on the world he lived in, like rock giants had taken residence in his very being and started a battle. Now that Thorin was no longer around, Bilbo felt even more restless than before. He could hardly sit still- he was always moving or shaking his legs, and he'd constantly clench and unclench his hands. More notably, he got into the habit of pulling his upper lip over his gums, making him look like a toothless gammy. His temper was shorter, patience thinner, and sleep was elusive.

Whispers spread and came back with friends. Mad Baggins, they began to call him–though never to his face. Not that Bilbo would disagree. He felt like he was going crackers. He felt trapped, and as time went by, his skin crawled and itched for Post Day. *Maybe Thorin has written,* he hoped. *It's only been three post days. He will write. He promised.*

It was six post days later that Bilbo found himself at the inn holding a letter written in perfect, runic-shaped letters bearing the name Thorin Oakenshield. He stared at the letter with a simple wax seal.

He wanted to open it.

Belladonna Baggins would tan his hide if he opened her mail. Because there, on the envelope, instead of Bilbo's name, was his mother's. He *could* read it and never let her know–hide it away.

But that was unwise.

Belladonna Baggins would wear boots just to kick his hide black and blue if she ever found out he'd read her mail *and* lied about it.

"Blast it," Bilbo growled down at the piece of paper. "Blast-blast- *blast* !"

When he got home, he searched the smile for any evidence of his father before bringing the letter to his mother. He scowled down at the ground and extended his hand with the letter before her face, blocking her crocheting.

"What's…" She trailed off, eyes going wide, and her jaw-dropping open. She shook herself and peered up at Bilbo with wariness. "Is your father home?" she whispered.

"No," he whispered back, belatedly finding it unnecessary since it was just the two of them.

His mother nodded and then chewed on her lip. "Did you ask that dwarf to write to you?"

Bilbo couldn't meet her eye as he nodded. "He's just a friend," Bilbo added quickly. He didn't think he needed to add that. They both knew his father wouldn't approve of Bilbo receiving letters from a dwarf even if he claimed he was a mere friend, which he was… *for now.* His mother arched a brow, then huffed a laugh and handed back the envelope instead. "There must be some mistake. I don't know an *Oakenshield* . I believe this letter belongs to Mr. *Underhill* ." She said with a pointed stare. "You be a dear and pick up his mail as well when you go get the post, will you?" She winked and stepped out to the garden, leaving a grinning Bilbo behind.

Goodness, I love my mother.

With probably too much nonchalance, Bilbo ambled away to his room. Then he quickly pushed a chair against the door, sat at his small desk, and ever so gently pried the wax seal open with his favorite letter opener.

First, he pulled out a small note written in a slightly shaky hand.

To the parents of Bilbo Baggins of The Shire,

I formally request your permission to write to your son, who I was recently acquainted with in Rivendell. You'll find the letter I have written to him in this envelope. If it pleases you, I ask that you permit Bilbo to read it and reply if he so wishes.

At Your Service,

Thorin son of Thrain

“Son of Thrain,” Bilbo whispered as he grazed the signature with his fingers. He set the note to his parents aside, then removed another sheet of paper.

Dear Bilbo,

I hope I can be as informal in my letters as we were when we last met, since you named me a friend. If I presume too much, please correct me in your reply. I will take no offense.

You requested that I give you advice about traveling. I have included a separate list of things you may want to take along with you on your travels. When you decide on your path, I hope you will make me aware of it. I have connections in many places, and I would like to extend them to you so that you may travel with as much ease and safety as your journey will permit.

I am finally in Ered Luin. My sister has been fussing over me, more so than over her own children, and I am her elder brother! I cannot say that I do not understand her concerns considering the state of my health, but my pride suffers under her constant mothering. She tried to tuck me into bed like a dwarfling, Bilbo!

Bilbo chuckled, picturing the tall and mostly stoic dwarf trying to bat his sister’s hands away from him. He rubbed at his aching cheeks from his dopey grin and read on.

Family headaches aside, my visit to Rivendell was a good one, surprisingly. I did not expect it, seeing that I was surrounded by elves. Previous visits were tiresome, and the food has always had much to be desired–a dwarf cannot live on green things alone. Still, my spirits are much improved. I attribute it to having much better company this time around.

A rush of warmth filled Bilbo’s chest and hugged the letter to himself with a bashful smile before he continued to read.

I hope you are in good health, Bilbo. Will you tell me more about your Shire? My memory of the place is limited. You have a gift with words, and I can only imagine what your descriptions will be like having time to consider before placing ink to paper.

I eagerly await your reply.

Always at your service,

Thorin

Bilbo's plan was simple.

First, pretend that everything was normal.

Second, keep up the correspondence between himself and Thorin, which had been going swimmingly.

Third, learn as much as possible about Fading.

And finally, manipulate his father into letting him leave home for a couple of years before his coming-of-age birthday– which was still two agonizing years away.

He couldn't take it anymore, Bilbo was ready to implement his plan.

"You want to go on an… *adventure* ?" Bungo's brow was furrowed as he looked up at his son from his desk chair.

"Yes."

Bungo shook his head and blinked rapidly. "I don't understand."

"Like mama used to," Bilbo said with determination. "I want to go and explore the world outside the Shire, just like she did."

"But…!" Bungo scoffed. "You're not of age to go gallivanting about!"

"Neither was mama." Bilbo puffed up his chest and stood straighter. He would not give up so easily.

Bungo stood from his chair and waved one hand angrily. "That's because her father was the Old Took! You are a Baggins!"

"And a Took!" Bilbo fumed and gulped down angry breaths. "I am as much Belladonna's son as I am yours."

Bungo's face went red. " *You are not your mother!* "

" *I'm not you either!* " While he'd yelled at his father when he was an emotional pubescent, it was never like this. Bilbo spoke as if they owed him this, like it was somehow his parent's fault he felt as he did and it was completely in their power to fix it. "You *know* there's something wrong with me–I've been this way my whole life. I'm different from other hobbits!"

Bungo stepped back and slumped. "What are you saying?"

Bilbo moved forward, looming and shaking. "You've been sending me to Rivendell for years. No one ever wants to talk about it, but I can't go on like this anymore! I feel suffocated in this house. And if the greatest healer in the land says that going on an adventure is going to help me get some *bloody* sleep, then I'm going to bloody well do it!"

Bungo blustered and straightened, lifting his chin and wagging a finger. “Bilbo Baggins! Don’t you dare speak to me that way!”

But Bilbo would not be cowed or deterred. “If you give me your blessing, I will court every lass in the Shire.” Bilbo sniffed and lifted his own chin. “That’s what you want most, isn’t it? For me to marry a Lady-hobbit of good stock as soon as I’m able?”

Bungo pursed his lips. “You’d really agree to that?”

“Give me your blessing to leave home, and I will *consider* whoever you want to be my wife. But *only* to consider. I will not marry for anything less than love.”

Bungo stayed silent for a moment. “You’ll give them a fair chance? At least get to the first gift before you deny them?”

Bilbo nodded. “Yes. I promise.” And because he’d already been so very bold, Bilbo stuck out his hand.

Bungo stared at it for only a second before he shook it firmly. “Deal.”

Bilbo could hardly believe his plan worked. After a lot of fuss and a tearful goodbye, Bilbo walked through the Shire with his head held high and a traveling pack around his shoulders. He ignored the mutterings and whispers of the other hobbits who watched him go. He didn’t care what they thought. His father, the very respectable Bungo Baggins, had given his blessing and let the whole of Hobbiton know.

Bilbo wasn’t sure this would protect his reputation, but he could not give two hoots. If ruining his reputation meant not having to entertain ladies upon his return, then so be it. He just hoped his parents didn’t suffer for his actions.

The first destination was not far at all. Bilbo visited his Took side of the family in Tuckborough. His mother had mentioned that her father would tell her stories about hobbits finding their heartsongs. He hoped his grandfather had written about them, as he had kept his memoirs and fantastical stories. There, he went through the journals of The Old Took. It was a few days before Bilbo finally found mention of Heartsongs.

His mother had told him what she knew, and it only made Bilbo more curious. Her descriptions of what it was supposed to be like when one met their heartsong felt a lot like how he felt in Thorin’s presence. And there, in the writings of Gerontius Took, Bilbo grew more certain.

But it didn’t explain everything.

Thorin is a dwarf, and there are no mentions of heartsongs being anything other than hobbits. The fact was a concerning one. Yes, Thorin’s voice made him feel like he’d smoked

too much Old Toby. Yes, he felt at peace when at Thorin's side. The very thought of Thorin made his lips curl up and his heart ache with longing.

But…

Thorin was Fading.

Which meant… Bilbo was not his heartsong. *Right?* Dwarves didn't even have heartsongs. They had Ones. There were no accounts of hobbits Fading from losing their heartsongs. The Old Took mentioned it was probably because hobbits had so many fauntlings that their love for their children sustained.

In the end, Bilbo's research didn't give him too much to go on, but at least he knew that his apparent heartsickness probably had more to do with being away from Thorin than needing adventure. He wanted to go to him. He wanted to go to him always, but Bilbo had to find a way to save him first. Running away from home to try and elope with a dwarf was out of the question. His parents would be run out of the Shire if anyone found out.

And though Thorin's letters held affection for Bilbo, he wouldn't delude himself into thinking anything more would come from their friendship, not while Bilbo was still considered, *ugh, underage.* . Bilbo was determined to be on equal ground with Thorin when they next met in person. Or, at least, as equal as possible.

He wanted to make Thorin proud.

Bree was his next stop. He met with his mother's old traveling companion, Gandalf the Wizard, who promised Belladonna he would escort him to Rivendell. It irked Bilbo that his parents didn't trust him to make the journey alone, but at least he'd have someone to talk to and hear stories about his mother's youth from a different perspective.

Bilbo was waiting for Gandalf by the inn when a familiar dwarf in a funny hat waved at him and jogged over.

"I remember you!" Bilbo exclaimed. He waved back excitedly and met the dwarf with quick strides of his own. "Bofur, correct?"

"Aye, ye have a good memory, Master Baggins!"

Bilbo's eyes widened. "As do you, apparently! It's been years since we met and you remember my name!"

The dwarf tugged on his beard and chuckled nervously. "Ah, well, yes, I guess so. What brings you to Bree?"

Bilbo told Bofur of his plans to go to Rivendell, and the dwarf made an exaggerated sound of surprise. "What a coincidence! Me and me company are headed there as well!"

"Really? I thought dwarves didn't like elves."

Bofur laughed. “True enough. You remember my husband, Nori?”

“I beg your pardon, your *what*?”

“Star-headed fella?”

Bilbo felt like he was doing a great impression of a fish, gaping silently as his mind tried to process the words. “Erm, yes–yes! Nori! Your… *husband* ?”

“Aye, so his younger brother…”

Once Bilbo was able to get over his initial shock, he gathered that Nori’s younger brother was going to study with the elves as he was in training to be a scribe. This delighted Bilbo as he saw his chance to learn more about Ones. He could pull two weeds with one yank!

The so-called small company was actually made up of ten dwarves that were all related in some way or another.

Two rambunctious brothers named Fili and Kili, who were older in years than Bilbo but *definitely* not as mature. For some reason, they’d adopted Bilbo as some kind of uncle. Bombur was the cook of the company and Bofur’s younger brother. Bifur still had an ax in his head, and was Bofur’s cousin. Oin was a healer and deaf as a post, and also Gloin’s brother. Then there were the Ri brothers, Dori, Nori and Ori. Bilbo got along with Ori best, as they both had a passion for history and books. And, Bilbo discovered that he had *not* misheard… Nori and Bofur were *definitely* married, being quite openly affectionate with each other too. After witnessing Bofur slap Nori’s rump and plant a kiss on his mouth, Bilbo couldn’t help himself.

“Sorry if I’m being nosy,” Bilbo said quietly to Ori, “but is it usual for two male dwarves to marry?”

Ori, for his part, didn’t seem put off by the question. “It’s not *unusual.* Not many dwarves marry. However, our female population is quite low, so it’s perfectly natural.”

“I see,” Bilbo breathed. This was excellent news to Bilbo. His heart sped up at the possibility that Thorin might welcome Bilbo’s advances when he finally made them. “Are-are they each other’s Ones?”

Ori shook his head but smiled. “They found their One in their Crafts, but fell in love when Nori stole Bofur’s coin purse.” Bilbo saw Ori’s cheeks flame. “Apparently, it was hidden in a very… secret place, if you catch my meaning.”

“Aye,” sighed Bofur as he seemingly replayed the fond memory in his mind. “Swiped it right from the deep dark chasm of me nether cheeks and my heart with it.”

Most of the dwarves burst out laughing as Bilbo covered his burning face in his hands.

Despite the extreme culture shock Bilbo experienced with the company, he was happy they were traveling together.

Especially when they ran into some trolls…

“Gandalf,” Bilbo panted after the ordeal.

“Yes, dear Bilbo.”

“Please don’t tell my parents what happened here.”

“I think that is best.”

And then they’d been chased by wargs…

“Gandalf… probably not a good idea to mention this either.”

“Mhm.”

And then narrowly escaping orcs…

“Gandalf–”

“Mum’s the word.”

Bilbo learned a lot in Rivendell about elves and dwarves alike, but even after a year, he was no closer to learning how to save Thorin. The company split up, leaving the Ri brothers behind as they made their way elsewhere for some vague business, though they promised to return. Before they departed, Bilbo made sure to ask all of them what they knew about Ones. He knew dwarves were a secretive race, and their answers had all been similar. So, Bilbo wasn’t certain whether they’d given him all the information available.

Lord Elrond was extremely accommodating and taught Bilbo everything he knew about Fading and how to soothe some of the symptoms, but only being near a soul partner could cure elves of the Fade. Oin had already confirmed the same treatment for dwarves.

Bilbo heard Lord Elrond’s daughter approach but barely looked up to acknowledge her. He was deep into another depressing story about elf fading after their partner had fallen in battle.

“I don’t think you’ll find your answer in the stories of others, Bilbo,” said Arwen with a sad smile. She placed a cup of tea on the table for him.

He was tired. Everything he learned just led him in circles. “Where shall I look then?” He sipped at his tea and rubbed at his tired eyes.

“Your own story would probably be a good start.” Arwen’s eyes twinkled knowingly. “Or maybe a hypothetical one?”

Bilbo was good at asking questions and learning but not as good as divulging his own information. He felt too embarrassed to admit that he was trying, in vain, to find a cure for an illness that not even the most famous healers had been able to cure. Who was he kidding? If Lord Elrond hadn’t cured Thorin yet, how could Bilbo?

Maybe it was time to just talk about his problem and get the concrete and devastating answer he’d been dreading since he first suspected that Thorin was his heartsong.

“Hypothetically…” Bilbo said slowly and began the convoluted story of a dwarf who had lost his One and, *let’s just say* , a hobbit who believed that the dwarf was his heartsong, but the dwarf was fading, and maybe the hobbit was too, and that the hobbit thought it was a grand idea to gallivant around Arda searching for a way to save the dwarf while also succumbing to his own despondency because he could find no answers.

Arwen had been extremely patient, bless her, and she waited until Bilbo ran out of words– even after most of it became babble. She hummed thoughtfully. “This dwarf–”

“ *Hypothetical* dwarf,” Bilbo corrected.

Arwen’s lips twitched. “This hypothetical dwarf told the hypothetical hobbit something interesting.”

“He did?” Bilbo tried to go back and hear his own words, repeating in his mind everything Thorin had mentioned at lightning speed but came up with nothing. “What?”

Her eyes twinkled. “Well, he said that the heart only wants one thing.”

“Love,” Bilbo said, “whether to give or receive it.”

“Yes. And the cure to heart sickness is–”

“To give it what it desires, but if that’s true then he wants his One, who is… well, they must be dead.”

“Must be?” Arwen raised an inquisitive brow. “You do not know for certain?”

Bilbo chewed on his lip and thought. “It’s the only logical conclusion…?”

“I disagree. What if his One lives but the bond has been rejected? Or what if it has nothing to do with loss at all, but the fact his One was never found? And you say that dwarves don’t have heartsongs and hobbits don’t have Ones, can they not be the same? They have different names but the idea is the same. A soul partner.”

His lungs felt tight, and the grip on his tea cup would have shattered the thing if he had any real strength left. “But… I’m a hobbit and he’s a dwarf… it’s never happened before.”

Arwen leaned forward and put a gentle hand on his tense shoulder. “Not every moment of history is recorded. Not everything can be known. And there is always a first for everything.” She squeezed his shoulder and stood. “If this dwarf’s heart lacks love, who better to give it than the one who loves him?” She smiled at him then widened her eyes as she appeared to remember something. “My original intention of seeking you out was to give you this.” She handed him a letter. “I’ll leave you now. Good evening.”

“Good evening,” he replied absentmindedly as he took the envelope.

Could it be as easy as that ? Bilbo mused as he rubbed at his chest–the ache there had grown with every passing day. Had he really been wasting so much time pouring over old texts, badgering dwarves and elves for answers when all that was necessary was to go to Thorin and just… love him?

Even if that wasn’t the case, how much time did Thorin have left? Why was Bilbo sitting in Rivendell collecting dust with the old books when he could be with the one who might heal his sick heart?

It was then he noticed that although the letter had Thorin’s name, it was not his handwriting. With a sense of foreboding, Bilbo tore open the letter.

Dearest Bilbo,

You might have noticed that this letter is not written in my own hand. Unfortunately, I have had to hire a scribe as my sight has, finally, completely failed me…

“I am a fool,” he whispered, not able to get past the devastating news. Then he jumped up out of his seat and ran to his room to pack, all while shouting, “I am such a fool!”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Thorin was a nervous wreck. He could not eat or sleep, but that was the norm lately. At least his anxieties kept him out of the bed that had practically become his primary place of residence.

Bilbo was coming.

Chapter Notes

I've completed chapter 10! My amazing friend and beta for this story Danypooh80 is currently going through it!

Thorin was a nervous wreck. He could not eat or sleep, but that was the norm lately. At least his anxieties kept him out of the bed that had practically become his primary place of residence.

Bilbo was coming.

At first, the hobbit had wanted to meet him in Ered Luin, but Thorin couldn't have him meet his family yet. The meddling of Fili and Kili would have been a certainty, and his sister, Dis, would have just egged them on. No, he couldn't have that, not when the terms were so close to being met! So, Thorin had told his One to meet him in Bree instead, saying he had business to attend to there–not a complete lie since his Spy Master, Nori, would be arriving with Bilbo's company.

A year.

One year left until Thorin would be allowed to go to the Shire and be free to tell Bilbo the truth. Thorin was no coward, having fought in numerous battles, but the thought of confessing to Bilbo made his stomach spasm painfully. He had a feeling that Bilbo would not take the news well when the time came. But now was not the moment to think about such things.

Bilbo was coming to Bree. He should already be in town if the company hadn't run into trouble. Considering how much trouble they had gotten into before reaching Rivendell, Thorin supposed it was possible. He shuddered to think that his One might have been caught up in more danger. Reading those accounts from Nori and Bilbo had given him nightmares

for weeks. But Thorin didn't think anything had gone amiss this time–Roac would have told him.

Dwalin finally entered their room. His cousin need not announce himself, as Thorin recognized the sound of his stomping steps from down the hall. Thorin stood and smoothed down his tunic nervously. "How do I look?"

Dwalin scoffed, placing what Thorin guessed was his breakfast tray, by the smell, on the table. "Like a starved, blind wraith with an eagle's nest on his head."

Thorin frowned. "Do I really look so horrid?" If he did, there was now way he could see Bilbo in such a state. "Let's go back to the mountain."

"Calm yer hairy nipples. I'll fix yer hair. Can ye at least try to eat some bread?"

Just the smell of the food made Thorin's stomach roil. He decided no answer was answer enough. He heard Dwalin sigh in defeat before he felt firm hands push him down to sit.

Quick hands undid his braids and combed through his hair. He didn't need to see to know his hair had thinned and fallen flat. He probably had more gray in it too. And his beard, what was left of it, that is, grew so patchy that he finally did the unthinkable and shaved it off. There had been a shouting match between him and Dis the day he took a blade to his own face. At least Thorin looked so ill that no one assumed he'd brought shame on himself. He wasn't sure what would have been worse, having others know their former King had brought dishonor to himself or having them pity him. Maybe the hair on his head was not as impressive as it used to be, but at least it was still there. Usually, he left his hair down to hide his gaunt, beardless face, and his wraith-like eyes.

But Bilbo was coming.

Thorin wanted to look his best with what limitations he had.

Once Dwalin found Thorin suitable enough to be seen, Dwalin tied his blindfold, handed Thorin his walking staff, and guided him through the inn. He heard a gasp and then Dwalin greeted Nori. Thorin's heart raced.

"Is Bilbo here?" Asked Thorin, shifting in his seat and turning his head to see if he could catch Bilbo's voice.

" *He'll be here soon* ," Nori said in Khuzdul. " *The journey was mostly peaceful. Fought off some bandits. That's about it. The hobbit barely slept on the road. He was in a mighty hurry to get here. And I'd say he's eating normally except I know his folk eat seven meals a day. He's a bit thinner than he was when we first set out to Imladris. But he seems his usual self, if a bit less… bouncy."*

Thorin nodded in understanding. The news was not ideal but his hobbit was alive and physically whole, at least. *"Thank you, Nori. You may go."* He listened to the rustle of clothes

and receding steps. The inn was getting loud and stuffy, and Thorin felt a slight pull to leave. “Dwalin, take us outside. I think he’s near.”

Bilbo stood outside the inn and just stared at the entrance. He swallowed hard and tugged on his sleeves, then combed his fingers through his curls that were much longer and more unruly than ever. His dwarf friends had teased him about braiding his hair, but now he knew how important hair was to dwarves and the only dwarf he’d allow to touch his curls would be Thorin and no one else. The idea excited him so much he’d gotten into the habit of tugging at his ends in hopes it would make his hair grow faster.

He hummed, tapped his feet, and rubbed his sweaty palms over his shirt. He wanted to wear his waistcoat, but it needed repairs, and it was too hot to wear his overcoat. So, that left his cleanest shirt and trousers with braces as his only options. Not that Thorin would be able to see what he was wearing… or notice how long his hair had gotten.

The mere thought made Bilbo’s heart ache.

After a few deep breaths, he was finally ready to enter the inn. Two dwarves emerged before Bilbo could make a move, and Bilbo’s poor mind couldn’t comprehend what it was presented with.

Thorin. It had to be him, but he looked so different. *His beard!* It was… gone. His hair was tied back as it usually was, with his two braids on either side, but it was more gray than the dark brown Bilbo remembered. The blindfold was no longer sheer, covering his eyes completely. His cheekbones were more prominent and his skin was a dull gray. The clothes on him fit but the belt around his waist just made Thorin’s unhealthy thinness more apparent. Despite the heat, Thorin wore a thick cloak that did well to hide most of his bony physique. But there was no way one could look at Thorin and not see that he was gravely ill.

He knew he shouldn’t blame himself for Thorin’s state, but couldn’t help it. *Maybe, if I’d come sooner…*

The other dwarf gave Thorin a staff and led Thorin’s hand to his arm. The casual familiarity struck Bilbo and he studied them a bit longer. The unknown dwarf was taller than Thorin, and… beefier. Stout and muscular with an impressive beard and a large semi-bald head with tattoos. He didn’t find this dwarf handsome, but Bilbo knew that dwarves had different standards for beauty, and Bilbo suddenly felt… inadequate. What if this dwarf was Thorin’s One who’d finally come to accept their bond? What if he was Thorin’s romantic partner, regardless? Something ugly and tar-like squirmed in Bilbo’s gut.

Bilbo subconsciously let out a small but devastated whine.

Thorin’s head immediately snapped up. If the dwarf had ears like a hobbit, they would have been twitching. He saw Thorin take a step forward, almost running into someone when the other dwarf guided him back. Bilbo let a small crowd pass before his feet finally took him to

his heartsong. He stopped right in front of Thorin who was gripping the other dwarf's arm tightly, and looking a bit twitchy. Bilbo's mouth was sealed shut. He had no idea what to say or do, all of his manners and training in gentility forgotten.

The other dwarf murmured something in Khuzdul that made Thorin inhale sharply through his nose.

"Bilbo?" The soft, low, and timid way Thorin spoke his name nearly shattered his heart to pieces.

"Hello, Thorin." His own voice sounded alien to him as he watched Thorin's face tremble, not knowing what emotion to convey at the moment.

One corner of Thorin's lips curled up, while the other fought hard to go in the opposite direction. Thorin let go of the dwarf next to him and reached out a quaking hand, his gesture uncertain and questioning.

Bilbo snatched his hand in both of his, and Thorin finally smiled–with teeth and everything. And it was *everything* to Bilbo. "I'm so happy to see you," Bilbo let out in a gust of breath.

Thorin pulled his hand out of Bilbo's quickly. Before Bilbo could feel hurt, Thorin gave the dwarf his staff and grabbed Bilbo's arms, feeling his way up to his shoulders and finally cupping his face in his hands. Thorin moved forward and leaned down. Bilbo's mind faltered in anticipation of a kiss, but Thorin just brought their foreheads together and rested there with his brilliant smile. "It is good to hear your voice again," he murmured with a quiver in his voice, his thumbs caressing Bilbo's warm cheeks.

Bilbo had no idea how long they stayed that way, breathing each other's air and floating on clouds of peace and utter joy.

"Well then," the forgotten dwarf grumbled, "I'll leave you to your hobbit."

Bilbo blushed furiously at being called Thorin's. They pulled apart, Thorin keeping one hand wrapped around Bilbo's arm as if Bilbo could vanish at any moment. "Thank you, Dwalin."

The dwarf, Dwalin, gave Thorin his staff and finally stomped away.

Belatedly, Bilbo realized they hadn't been properly introduced and the dwarf didn't seem happy at all about leaving Thorin with him. "Oh dear, I'm afraid I was rude to your… *friend* ."

Thorin squeezed his arm and shook his head. "My cousin is a bit rough around the edges. I'll introduce you properly later. He won't go far. My sister has threatened him with pain of death if anything should befall me under his watch."

Bilbo felt a sliver of relief at the dwarf being Thorin's relative, but since practically everyone in the Shire was related to someone in some roundabout way, Bilbo tamped down his urge to have Thorin clarify further. *Kissing cousins is a term for a reason,* he thought with a pout.

"Is your sister so frightening?"

“Terrifying.”

Bilbo laughed, his cheeks hurting from all the smiling. “Shall we go inside or do you fancy a walk?”

“I’ve been indoors too long. I find myself longing for sunlight and fresh air.”

“Ah, two of my favorite things. Let us walk for a bit, then.”

Thorin gave a slight bow. “Lead the way.”

Bilbo could hardly believe he was walking through the market with Thorin. His cheeks ached, he hadn’t smiled so much in ages. There was a bounce in his step and a lightness in his heart. Thorin kept up an almost constant smile of his own and seemed to enjoy himself immensely. It gave Bilbo some hope that perhaps he might be enough to bring Thorin some kind of happiness–that maybe there was a chance for more between them at some point.

A quick frown stole away Bilbo’s smile when he thought about all the marriage prospects his father intended him to meet before his coming-of-age party. It was as if his father wanted him to announce his choice on the very day and get married the next. It was absurd how much his father wanted him to find a lady to woo. On the list were hobbits that Bilbo had grown up with and had barely stayed friends with. There wasn’t a single male hobbit on the list either, obviously. Bilbo wished he could go back in time and never make that deal with Bungo. How was he supposed to help Thorin when he had to strut around like some prized stallion? Not to mention it really *was* unfair to the ones who were actually hoping to nab Bilbo as a husband. It was just not going to happen.

Meanwhile, Bilbo wondered how he would win Thorin over. They were friends, and if that was all they were meant to be, then that was fine by Bilbo, though his heart would break a little. How did one move from friendship to… more? How was he supposed to preserve their friendship while also approaching Thorin with a romantic offer at the same time? Was it even possible? He would have to make it very clear that he was interested and see how Thorin reacted, and it had to be more obvious than throwing coy glances at his blind companion.

Even more than holding hands down the street. He couldn’t believe he was allowed to hold Thorin’s hand! He felt a bit wicked in enjoying it so much since his friend was unaware of his affections. The dwarf’s hand was calloused and bony, but warm and firm in Bilbo’s.

“It’s so warm, Thorin, do you want me to take your cloak?”

“Thank you, Bilbo, but I am usually… cold often…” he trailed off uncertainly.

Bilbo wanted to kick himself. For want of something better to talk about, he had to not only mention the weather, but also placed focus on Thorin’s illness. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to–”

“Peace, Bilbo,” he smiled, “I am warm enough… now.” His statement seemed to have a deeper meaning, or so Bilbo hoped.

The bustle of the market helped any awkward silences between them, and eventually, Bilbo’s shyness finally ebbed away as he spoke about what he saw available in the stalls. From there it was easy to hold a conversation as whatever was mentioned led to tangents upon tangents, and Bilbo was quite skilled with keeping up idle chatter. They fell into a lovely ease and their stances relaxed until they were pressed together. The best part about it was that no one looked twice at their intimacy, mostly due to Thorin’s blindfold.

“Oh, look!” Bilbo exclaimed and pulled Thorin to a sweet-smelling stall full of baked goods. “Do you like peach pastries?”

Thorin pursed his lips and nodded slowly. “I… used to.”

“I won’t hide my intentions, Thorin Oakenshield, I mean to fatten you up!”

Thorin chuckled. “You may certainly try.”

Care and physical contact by loved ones were said to be soothing for those Fading, as Bilbo learned from Lord Elrond. Bilbo wasn’t sure Thorin held enough affection for Thorin to consider him a loved one, but he certainly meant to become one. Bilbo had already decided that he would do anything to help Thorin. Feeding Thorin with his own hands was a daunting idea, but one he meant to try nonetheless. He paid for the pastry and without letting himself think about it, lifted it to Thorin’s lips.

“Have a bite then,” he urged the dwarf, tapping the sticky flakes to his lips.

Thorin pulled back in surprise, but after a moment, he leaned forward again and opened his mouth.

Bilbo slid it back onto his lips and watched with rapt attention as Thorin took a slow bite, licking his lips in sympathy. A small flake stuck to Thorin’s bottom lip, and Bilbo instinctively used his thumb to brush it off. Thorin froze under his ministrations, but Bilbo found some confidence that Thorin did not move away.

The hobbit was happy that Thorin couldn’t see his blushing face, but then noticed a hint of pink to Thorin’s cheeks as well. Thorin waited even after Bilbo had finished his task. He didn’t seem uncomfortable, for which Bilbo was eternally grateful. No, Thorin looked… expectant–waiting for more.

“You look so different without your beard,” Bilbo heard himself say. And again, he would have swallowed his own shoe if he wore any.

Thorin flinched, and a brief look of sorrow flashed on his face before he schooled it to something more neutral. “It certainly feels different. I know that my… appearance has… changed much. Is it… does it bother you?” *Vallar* , Thorin looked so wretched that Bilbo just wanted to wrap his arms around the dwarf and protect him from any pain.

“It does,” Bilbo admitted and watched Thorin’s shoulders slump, “but only because it means you’re ill. And I wish… I want to help. I *can* help, Thorin. Would you let me? There are things that can be done to-to alleviate some of the symptoms, and I would be so honored if you allowed me to do those things for you. I know you and I are not family, and most of our years of friendship were built through words on paper, but-but–”

“Yes,” Thorin finally said, whisper-soft but determined. “I don’t particularly enjoy… asking for… *any* assistance, but you–I’d let *you* . And your words over the years have made me feel less alone in the world, Bilbo. I cherish our friendship very much. If you are questioning whether your actions would make any difference, then I must tell you they would. You are very dear to me.”

Bilbo was left speechless and swallowing down a complete and devastating emotional breakdown. Thorin wanted to *live* . And Thorin thinks Bilbo can help. That was a sure sign that they shared something truly special. Even if it was not romantic love, it was deep and pure. Bilbo wanted to cry with elation, he wanted to celebrate, he wanted to *kiss* the dwarf in front of him. He quickly reigned in his thoughts at that. It would not do to start musing on silly romantic notions when they were probably nowhere near any of that nonsense. “You… you are very dear to me too, Thorin.” His voice was an utter wreck, breathy and cracking. But Thorin smiled so brilliantly that Bilbo had to dig his nails into his palm so as not to climb the beautiful dwarf before him and kiss him silly. “Have some more pastry, you skinny thing. It’s time to make due on my word!”

Thorin chuckled but opened his mouth obediently. And Bilbo fed him. Sometimes Thorin’s teeth or the tip of his tongue would drag against Bilbo’s fingers which would make Bilbo’s knees tremble. He might faint by day’s end. Thorin also made appreciative humming noises, and it makes Bilbo’s gut clench with a want so hard that even Thorin reacts to it.

Thorin is struck with a tsunami of arousal from his One, and it nearly bowls him over. If he and Bilbo hadn’t sat down to finish the sweet, Thorin would have been flat on his back. It was still a close thing. Bilbo *wanted* him.

In this very moment, he wants me. Me.

Thorin was dumbfounded with the knowledge. He hadn’t expected that. He had hoped that someday it would happen but had resorted to pushing away such thoughts because he didn’t want to be disappointed if it never did. But it did happen.

“Thorin? Are you all right?”

Thorin’s breath came out in short pants and upon realizing it began to take control over his breath. “I’m fine. Just… tired. I haven’t done much exercise in some time, so I’m afraid I’ve passed my limit.”

“Oh, Thorin! Why didn’t you say something sooner?”

Thorin ducked his head and admitted quietly, “I didn’t want this day to be over so soon.”

He heard Bilbo scoff. “Just because you need a kip, doesn’t mean I have to leave.” His voice turned timid. “You said I could help…”

Thorin swallowed and licked his dry lips. “Yes. Yes, I did.”

“Good.” Bilbo sounded determined, but there was a hint of nervousness when he continued. “I was hoping to start right away. I-I might need some shuteye as well.”

Thorin was certain he was going to die. “I…,” Thorin breathed, “have a room.” He began to think it was a bad idea. A very bad idea. One year. Less than, actually. Eight months. Eight months and twelve days.

He listened as Bilbo coughed and cleared his throat. “Let’s be off then,” he squeaked.

Bilbo had no delusions about what would happen in Thorin’s room. For one thing, Dwalin and Thorin were sharing a room. There were two beds. Thorin had appeared apprehensive about bringing Bilbo to his room, but that could have been because he was not used to accepting help. That was most likely the culprit. Definitely not because he was interested in having his way with him. Certainly not. Anyway, Thorin was clearly exhausted. At least there was constant color to his cheeks. That had to be a good sign.

Bilbo led Thorin to his bed, helped him remove his cloak but stopped himself from helping with his belt. That was a bit too far too soon. But Thorin easily took care of it and sat on the bed to remove his boots. He paused after that and gripped the sheets tightly beside his thighs. “Would you… remove my blindfold and… loosen my hair? Maybe… undo my braids?”

“I would love to,” Bilbo nearly whispered reverently. He wanted to stroke that hair, and wanted to run his fingers through those soft-looking tresses the moment he laid eyes on him. “I could comb it for you.”

Thorin inhaled slowly. “Please.”

“Will you sit on the floor for me?” He watched Thorin comply and make room for Bilbo to sit behind him. Bilbo moved to the bed. “Comb?”

“Drawer by the bed.”

Bilbo retrieved the combs, for there was more than one. Two combs of different sizes and a brush with many bristles. First, Bilbo untied the blindfold and set it on the table. Then he slowly removed beads and ties. After, he took his sweet time unraveling each braid. Taking a comb with wide thick teeth, he worked through some minor tangles. He skipped the other comb and picked up the brush, lovingly going from top to bottom in sections. Thorin’s head tipped forward suddenly causing them both to startle in alarm.

“Oh, goodness!” Bilbo went around to kneel before his friend. “You’re falling asleep.” Thorin blinked in a daze but nodded. Bilbo tried his best not to react to the shock of Thorin’s eyes. They were covered in a white film that almost made it look like Thorin had no irises! His heart hurt. “Come on.”

He placed one of Thorin’s arms around his shoulder and held him by the waist. Thorin was so unexpectedly light that he had to steady them both after getting up too fast. “Sorry.” Thorin merely grunted, and Bilbo helped him into bed, and covered him in a thick blanket.

“Will you stay a while?” Thorin whispered.

“I’ll stay the whole night if you let me,” Bilbo replied.

Thorin was asleep before he could answer with more than a hum. Only a few minutes went by before Thorin gasped and his eyes snapped open, looking panicked. “Bilbo?” He reached out frantically, and Bilbo took his hand in both of his.

“I’m here. Go back to sleep. I’m staying all night, I promise.”

“You will?” Thorin sounded so wretched that Bilbo couldn’t help cupping his face in one hand and stroking his cheek with his thumb.

“I will.”

Thorin closed his eyes and squeezed Bilbo’s hand, then fell asleep once more.

Another handful of minutes went by, or so Bilbo thought, as he continued to gaze at Thorin’s sleeping face. His friend was so ill. But he was breathing–with some difficulty but, still, breathing.

“Are ye just gonna moon over him all night?”

Bilbo’s heart flew from his chest with fright and he almost woke Thorin with his gasp. He sent a glare to Dwalin who was sitting on the second bed (how had he missed a large dwarf waltz through the room?) watching him. “Sweet gardens of paradise,” he hissed. Then the words hit him. “Night?” For the first time, Bilbo noticed the light in the room had dimmed considerably. He looked out the window and saw that it was near dusk. “Goodness!”

Dwalin just snorted with amusement.

After an awkward silent staring contest, Bilbo gazed back at Thorin. “He… I offered to stay… the night.”

“Good,” Dwalin grunted.

Bilbo whipped his gaze to the large dwarf. “Good?” Well, that was further proof that Dwalin was not a *kissing* cousin or otherwise. Bilbo turned his head to hide a small, pleased smile.

“Aye. He hasn’t gotten any decent sleep in… a long time. His nephews take turns sleeping with him. It helps. And he’s been out for a couple of hours. I’m pretty sure ye were asleep

with yer eyes open."

In response, Bilbo yawned until he thought his jaw might pop off. "I could use some rest."

Dwalin nodded. "The bed's big enough for ye both. I'll bring some dinner." The dwarf stood and made his way to the door. He paused and turned to Bilbo. "I know ye don't know me, and I know it's no favor to me, but… thank you. For agreeing to help him."

Bilbo nodded. "I'll do anything and everything it takes to help him." He didn't mean to sound so lovesick, but it happened.

Dwalin bowed his head in thanks and left the room.

Bilbo stayed still, listening to Dwalin's footsteps go away. Then he turned to Thorin and caressed his hair at his temple. Gently, and with a furious blush, Bilbo pulled the blanket down and laid on his side. He tucked them back in and settled. His eyes stayed on Thorin's profile, and his bare Adam's apple, at his lips, until his eyes fluttered closed.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

> They grew closer. As time went by, they became too comfortable with their new routine. Bilbo stopped caring if he'd been recognized in town. He stopped watching over his shoulder and continued on as if nothing wrong could ever happen. But no road can remain smooth for long.

Chapter Notes

> A little more angst...
>
> By the way, if you're curious, Donuts and Churros is complete and is available to read for free on wattpad (it's also on amazon kindle unlimited). So, that's two self-published books! YAY!

Bilbo was able to stay two weeks before he decided to stop playing with fate and tell his parents he was staying in Bree. The longer he snuck around, the more likely he'd be seen by someone who would mention it to his parents. Instead, he wrote to them and told them not to come into town because he would be home soon. This would give his parents time to arrange whatever celebrations for his return.

But he didn't want to leave Thorin. The dwarf was finally showing signs he was healing. Unfortunately, it wasn't anything drastic. He could sleep better with Bilbo close– he'd woken to Thorin wrapped around him so many times he couldn't fathom waking up any other way. Thorin's appetite was more regular. He still ate little, but he had more frequent meals. Bilbo tried to always feed him something by hand.

One thing that gave Bilbo hope was that Thorin had made arrangements to stay in Bree more permanently. Apparently, he'd purchased a small house. Bilbo wanted to ask him why, but decided it was not worth mentioning. Thorin would be close enough to visit. He would resume his duty to pick up the post every week, and he'd spend a night or two with Thorin. He was already planning a way to extend his time in Bree without raising suspicion. The tricky part was to convince his friend Halfred to make it seem he was staying at his home, as he used to.

It turned out to not be so tricky after all. Once Bilbo swore him to secrecy, he told him as much of the truth as he could. That he had met someone whom Bungo would not approve of because of his sex, and he wanted to spend more time getting to know this person before

breaking the news to his parents. Halfred immediately agreed and was happy to help as long as he got to meet the mystery hobbit soon.

Bilbo did not correct him, but agreed.

So, Thorin was sleeping, eating, and smiling more, and Bilbo realized with great joy that he was too. He dreaded their separation, and he could tell Thorin felt the same–forcing smiles and cheer into his voice.

“I’ll be fine. Dwalin is staying with me, and my personal healer is already in town,” Thorin assured.

Bilbo barely held it together when it was time to part. He must have embraced Thorin at least four times before finally dashing out the door with a heavy heart and quiet tears. He tried not to think about Dwalin taking his place on his side of the bed, of Dwalin feeding Thorin from his fingers or brushing his hair… of washing his hair.

Now *that* had been something.

Ordering baths for Thorin, furiously praying to Yavannah for perseverance as Thorin undressed, helping Thorin into the bath, waiting for Thorin to request his help in washing his hair. His poor dwarf was so thin, he could see his ribs and spine and the bones of his shoulders. But every touch to the milky-white skin was torture and bliss all wrapped into one. After washing that lovely hair, Bilbo would scrub his back and rub his tense shoulders. Thorin would *melt* in his hands, and Bilbo would have to bite back dreamy sighs because he was just too thrilled to be the cause of Thorin’s momentary pleasure and happiness.

Soon, Bilbo arrived at Bag End, still rewatching the newest memories he’d made with Thorin in his mind’s eye. Therefore, he was still a bit dazed when his parents greeted him before he could knock. He was too busy the rest of the day and evening saying hello to everyone who came by, family and friends, and a growing number of special introductions to daughters. There was not much time in between to think of his dwarf but he held onto his image so that he could see him every time he closed his eyes.

No more than a few days passed by before his father was already hinting at spending time with so-and-so whose daughter was so-and-so. With a painful ache in his chest, Bilbo agreed to the first meeting. The faster he could meet these ladies, the quicker he could be over this farce.

It was as if his father had penciled in every lady in the shire for teatime. Bilbo would not have put it past him to start a line of lady-hobbits at the door! At one point, Bilbo forgot their names as quickly as he’d heard them. And they talked about such similar things that all conversations were blurring together.

“What are your favorite hobbies?” Bilbo would ask. And the answers would all be the same–Bilbo was certain every hobbit lass memorized the same script.

“... I love to cook and bake…”

“... Cleaning always helps me with my stress…

“... I love taking care of my younger siblings….”

“... I can’t wait to have fauntlings of my own!”

He knew Thorin’s hobbies… the ones he had *before* and the ones he had *now.* Thorin had enjoyed sparring with his cousin and nephews, he’d loved to work with silver. When he began to lose his sight, he turned to his harp. He read as many books as he could.

Now, Thorin enjoyed listening to music. He’d have a harp again soon and most likely begin to play once more. He liked going on walks with Bilbo, holding hands. He loves it when Bilbo combs his hair. He asks Bilbo to read to him. They both love to sit and smoke their pipes while listening to the sounds of the nights. Thorin says he’s always been a bit messy, and can’t cook worth a damn. He was a fighter and a leader, and loves good food–especially if Bilbo cooks it.

Days, weeks, and months passed.

“My birthday is around the corner…”

Thorin smiled. “I know.”

“I would love it if you could attend.”

Thorin squeezed his hand and brought their foreheads together. “It would be an honor.”

They grew closer. As time went by, they became too comfortable with their new routine. Bilbo stopped caring if he’d been recognized in town. He stopped watching over his shoulder and continued on as if nothing wrong could ever happen. But no road can remain smooth for long.

“What do you mean they’ve gone?” Bilbo asked the stableboy when he found Thorin’s house locked and empty. “They knew I was coming today, where did they go?”

“Went back to the Blue Mountains,” the boy replied. “Master Thorin grew very ill and Master Oin was visiting family back home.”

Bilbo raised a hand for the boy to stop. His chest tightened and ached. Something happened to Thorin. “But he was fine. He was… he was doing so much better!”

The boy shrugged and frowned. “He was at the pub when it happened. You can go there and ask what happened.”

So Bilbo did.

“Ah, yes,” the barman said with a grave nod of his head, “the dwarf you speak of was sitting right over there with his bald friend. They seemed to be having a good time. But then a hobbit lass was here with her mum. I saw him talk to them briefly and then, *wham,* he went down like a tree at the loggers.”

Bilbo turned and scanned the room. “Do you remember who the hobbits were?”

“Erm… the Littlefoots, I think…”

“Salvia? Salvia Littlefoot?”

“That’s right!”

Bilbo felt all his blood drain from his face. “Thank you,” he whispered. And walked away.

He reached the Littlefoots in record time. He had to be certain. He had to know if his theory was correct. He hoped and prayed to all the Vallar that he was wrong.

Salvia opened the door. Her eyes grew wide, and she looked over her shoulder quickly before stepping out.

“Bilbo Baggins, what are you doing here? You’re supposed to send notice first!”

“I know. I’m sorry. I just had to ask you something. I’m sorry. But did you speak with a dwarf recently? He’s my friend, and they told me he had an accident…”

“The blind one?”

Bilbo nodded.

“Yes, it was the strangest thing. He apologized for eavesdropping and asked me to repeat myself–”

“What did you say?”

Salvia blushed. “I was telling my sister how much I liked the courting gift you sent me–”

“I have to go.” Bilbo fled.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A few days later, a letter arrived from the hobbit who broke her brother's heart.
"He wishes to see you," she said after reading it.
"And I wish to see him," Thorin said easily.
Dis bristled and glared at him. "Do you not hate him?"
"Could you ever hate your One?"
She grumbled. "No."

Chapter Notes

Rollercoaster ahead but al will be well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dis was going to kill the hobbit.

Her poor brother was in agony, silent as the grave and as stony as the mountains they lived in, but she could see it. She knew that kind of pain firsthand. The pain of losing her One had left her a broken mess. And although Thorin's One was still alive, he may have rejected the bond to Thorin's face instead of sneaking around courting behind his back! How could he? How dare he spurn their King, the only brother she had left?

She watched as her sons raced into the royal healing chambers and clambered up onto either side of their uncle.

"We came as soon as we heard, uncle," Fili whispered.

"We're here," Kili said, wrapping his uncle in his arms and sobbing.

Thorin tried to raise his arms, but did not have the strength. Their journey back had been with such haste that even Dwalin collapsed from the lack of rest and food.

Everything had been going so well! There were only days left until the hobbits stupid birthday! *How could this have happened?*

A few days later, a letter arrived from the hobbit who broke her brother's heart.

“He wishes to see you,” she said after reading it.

“And I wish to see him,” Thorin said easily.

Dis bristled and glared at him. “Do you not hate him?”

“Could you ever hate your One?”

She grumbled. “No.”

Thorin reached out to her and Dis took his hand gently. “It was never romantic…”

“That’s not how everyone else interpreted it. You slept in the same bed and shared so much!”

Thorin took in a shaky breath and she could see him struggle to speak without shedding tears. “There are those who can remain friends–”

Dis groaned and shook his hand so as not to strangle him. “That’s considering both their desires! Thorin, if you long for more it is because there is the capacity for more! Somewhere deep down, the hobbit must feel the same!”

Thorin turned away from her, possibly to hide his pain. “Their culture is different…”

“Then you must tell him the truth! Give him a chance to choose! I thought he wasn’t supposed to start courting until he came of age?”

Thorin pulled his hand away and turned the rest of his body to face the wall. “It’s common for the process to start sooner with special permission from each family. If he is courting then he wishes to marry… he probably wants children…”

She stood, shaking with frustration and began to pace. “So, you will never tell him?”

He stayed quiet for a long time. So long, Dis thought he might not answer. But he did. “Maybe it is best if I say nothing to him.”

“Fool!” Dis spun around and stalked off. She found Kili and sent him to Thorin while she drafted a letter to the stupid hobbit.

To Mr. Underhill,

Please come to the address below as quickly as you can manage. My brother is very unwell. If you wish to try and save him, there is something you must know. Make haste.

Dis daughter of Thrain

Bilbo wished he could appreciate the fact that he is finally in Ered Luin. He does find himself briefly awed by the architecture and technology in the dwarven city. He was happy to find Dwalin, but the dwarf did not seem to reciprocate his feelings. Dwalin was more curt than usual and glowered more fiercely. He honestly couldn't blame him. The further they went into the city, the more Bilbo's jaw dropped.

They finally came to the healer's and he recognized Oin, who embraced him.

"I wondered if Thorin's healer was the same Oin!"

The old dwarf nodded and laughed weakly. "Yes. One and the same. Eh, Bilbo–"

"Are you Baggins?" Another dwarf entered.

Bilbo took a step back from the imposing figure that looked eerily like Thorin. "I-I am. Yes."

The dwarf stood straighter, eyes narrowing. "I am Dis. Thorin's sister."

Bilbo blinked and gaped. Thank goodness she mentioned it. He would not have known he was speaking to a dwarrowdam! "A-a pleasure! At your service and your families!" He made a clumsy bow.

"Come with me." She turned on her heel and went through a door.

Oin gave him an apologetic look and motioned him ahead.

Bilbo was terrified with what he would find. He expected Thorin to be not long for this world, alone, in bed, barely breathing. What he found was Thorin sitting on his bed with Fili and Kili behind him, combing and braiding Thorin's hair. "Boys?! What? What are you doing here?!"

"Bilbo?" Thorin let out in a disbelieving gust of breath.

Fili and Kili looked like they'd been caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Kili spoke first. "Hello there, Uncle Boggins. We, erm…"

Fili smacked Kili's shoulder. "Let's go. They have a lot to talk about. It's nice to see you again, Bilbo."

Dazed and utterly confused, Bilbo nodded. "Same, same…" he watched them leave and saw Dis muttering in Thorin's ear before she too left and shut the door behind her. Bilbo's shame returned almost immediately upon being left alone in the quiet, dimly lit room with Thorin… who must think him the biggest cad in all of Arda. "Thorin?" He said meekly.

Thorin inhaled sharply. He was a mess of emotions. He should have known that Dis would ruin everything! The tone Bilbo filled his name with was heartbreaking. But how could he

comfort his One when he was not prepared to see him so soon after his heartbreak? “Hello, Bilbo,” he rasped, throat raw and dry.

“Thorin… I… I have something to tell you…”

Thorin braced himself. He couldn’t. He could not hear the words. “If this is about you courting, then I already know and you have no fault in this whatsoever. I only wish that you had trusted me with such… important news. I… I would have been happy for you.”

Oh, but that had come out so false!

“What I mean is… I only wish for your happiness. And… and you and I–I would wish for us to remain friends…”

“Well, I don’t…” Bilbo whispered.

An actual spear through the chest would have hurt less. “I see–” Thorin choked out, unable to suppress the sob of pain that tore through him so suddenly he actually clutched at his chest.

He felt Bilbo on him in a flash. “No, no! Shh-shh! Please, please you misunderstand! I-I… I love you, Thorin!”

Thorin gripped Bilbo’s shirt and dropped his head on his shoulder. He heaved and rubbed at his heart while Bilbo rubbed at his back and stroked his hair. Those words repeated themselves along with other sweet nothing’s that Thorin felt more than heard. There was pain. So much pain, but it was not just his own. Bilbo was hurting too. But it didn’t make sense. Bilbo was courting a hobbit-lass. Had given her a courting gift! “Please,” he begged, “please do not pity me, Bilbo. I cannot stand it.”

Bilbo keened in agony and Thorin’s chest tightened painfully again. “Please believe me! You are my heartsong, Thorin! I knew the moment I first heard your voice so many years ago. I’m only courting because it was an agreement my father and I had made in order for him to give me his blessing to leave home. I knew that was what he wanted most, so I bargained for my freedom.”

“I thought I had to… I wanted to find a way to save you! It’s why I went to study healing in Rivendell. I wanted to save you from Fading! I’ve been feeling the effects of the Fade, I think you knew this already. I thought you only let me help you because you knew it would help me too. Oh, Thorin, I didn’t tell you about the courting because I didn’t want you to exclude me as a… romantic partner… I’m sorry. Please forgive me for being a coward!” Bilbo’s breath was short and quick after his rambling apology, and he squeezed Thorin harder as he waited for his judgment.

“You really mean it?”

Bilbo let out another small noise of pain at not being believed so readily. “Yes, of course I do! I love you, and I’ll say it as often as I need to… and show you if you’ll let me. It doesn’t matter if I am your One or not. I don’t care. Just… let me love you.”

There should not have been more room for Thorin to burrow closer, but he managed it anyway. “You are my One,” he murmured and squeezed his eyes shut. He was breaking the rules. But what did a handful of days matter now that they were here and had waited so long?

“What?”

“You, Bilbo Baggins of the Shire, *are* my One.” Thorin stayed still as a statue, listening to Bilbo’s pulse pound. No, he waited for Judgement too.

He felt Bilbo Tighten his grip in his hair and then immediately unclench. “I am? I’m your One?” And he sounded so hopeful. “I… wait… why-why didn’t you tell me? When did you know?”

Thorin was not ready. He was nowhere near ready, and he’d been preparing for thirty-three years. He would never be ready.

Bilbo straightened and tried to pull away, but Thorin held fast. “Thorin?” His voice was more sober and made Thorin’s blood run cold. “How do you know Oin… and Fili and Kili?”

Thorin shivered. “Fili and Kili are my sister-sons. Oin… and everyone in your company is related to me in some way. They are my most trusted shield brothers and kin. I sent them to accompany you on your journey. I… had to protect you the only way I could.”

Bilbo stayed silent, and Thorin started to shake with anticipation. Finally, Bilbo spoke, and he didn’t sound too upset. “Did Ori really have to study in Rivendell?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm. Then I suppose I can… let that go.” He chuckled and stroked Thorin’s hair again. “So, you must have known since we first met in Rivendell? How foolish we both have been,” he giggled. But when Thorin tensed and said nothing, Bilbo stilled once more. “You did know since then, didn’t you?” Still, Thorin provided nothing and began to tremble harder. He felt Bilbo grab his shoulders and pried Thorin off of him. “Thorin. Did… did you find out after or… or… Before?”

Thorin sniffed and silent tears slipped down his cheeks. “Before.”

“How long before…?” *Silence.* He gave Thorin a small shake. “How long?” His tone was sharp and deadly.

“Every dwarf feels the arrival of their One into the world. It is an immutable and all-encompassing event that no dwarf could mistake.” Thorin held his breath and waited. And waited. And waited until his lungs burned for air.

Bilbo released him and stepped back out of his reach, taking his warmth along with him. “You've known since I was *born?* ”

Thorin nodded.

“And-and… did you know… no, no, impossible, you couldn’t have known how to find me… could you?”

More silence seemed to be answer enough.

“No. Why… Why in middle-earth would you have waited so long to find me? Were-were you not happy that you had a One?”

Thorin’s hand shot out reflexively but he pulled it back. “I was happier than I had ever been in my one hundred fifty years of life the day I felt your Call.” There was no way that Bilbo could mistake the sincerity in his voice.

“Oh… oh. So, then… it must have been because of my age,” he said, disappointment dripping from his voice. “You could have tried to find me sooner!” And now Bilbo sounded angry. “You made yourself so sick waiting! It’s not unheard of for hobbits to marry before coming of age! There are special circumstances, well, because sometimes tweens get into all kinds of trouble in their experimenting years, but I would certainly say *this* is a special circumstance as well! Thorin, how could you do this to yourself? To *me?!* Do you think that my Longing has made my life easier? Did you think that knowing this is *all* my-my ff-fault would-would–!?”

Thorin heard Bilbo’s muffled sobs, and each one left a hole in his heart. “Bilbo, please forgive me–”

Dis burst into the room shouting, “Don’t you dare apologize for that! His parents forbade your involvement until his thirty-third birthday. They held him hostage! You had no choice!”

“ *What* ?!” Bilbo shrieked.

“Dis!” Thorin hissed at his sister. “They have different customs! In their eyes, it was no different from an arranged marriage to an *infant!* I understood this, and I agreed with their decision because I thought it would be in Bilbo’s best interest! You have no right to meddle in this–”

Fast footsteps ran from the room.

“Hobbit!” Dis cried and chased after him.

“Bilbo?”

He’d left. He’d just… left. He left him.

“Bilbo,” he said weakly, head feeling funny and nose suddenly tingling. Air. He needed air! He couldn’t get any air!” “Bi–” Thorin’s lungs would not expand and everything sounded as if his head was underwater. The world tilted and pain exploded on his face and shoulder.

Bilbo was grabbed harshly. He knew there would be bruises. He was spun around and hissed at by Thorin’s sister, but there was no rage in her eyes, only pure, utter terror.

“You can’t leave! Please, you can’t leave.” She dropped to her knees and tears spilled over freely. “I beg of you! If you have any love for him, please go to him and say you forgive him. He will die! He will die-he will die-he will die…” her words turned to sobs.

It was the sound of a loud crash that made Bilbo rip his arms out of her ironclad grasp, tearing his shirt in the process, and fly through the doors once more. His heart froze when he found Thorin on the ground, blood pooling from his head.

“ *THORIN* !” He threw himself to the floor and pulled Thorin into his arms. “HELP! PLEASE!”

Oin, Dis, Fili, and Kili ran through the room shouting in Khuzdul. They helped Bilbo place Thorin on the bed while Oin shouted instructions. Bilbo made to move and help when Oin pushed him back into Thorin.

“Speak to him! Let him hear your voice! And don’t let him go–under any circumstances!”

Bilbo didn’t need to be told twice. “Thorin,” he cried, “I’m still here! I forgive you! I’m not even angry with you!” He was, but that could be dealt with later. “I’m still here! I will not leave you. I love you. I love you so much. You can’t leave me. I’ll Fade, you know? I’ll follow you. It would be very poor form of you to leave me now right before my birthday–very poor form indeed!” He kept speaking, not understanding a word any more but knowing he spoke from the heart. And he prayed with all his might as he rocked Thorin in his arms–hands, bandages, ointments, and curses flew around them both until things grew gradually quiet.

He felt a hand grip his shoulder and shake him lightly. He stopped his stream of words at last as he looked through his blurry vision at the healer. “He was overwhelmed. The wound on his head is shallow. He displaced his shoulder from the fall. It’s been set and bandaged as well. He sleeps now.”

There’s a bell right here if you need anything or if he develops a fever,” he pointed to it on the bedside table. “I’ll be checking in again soon. Skin contact is preferable. No stirring the pot in any capacity! You both need sleep!” He waited for Bilbo to acknowledge his words and then left, closing the door softly behind him.

No one else was in the room.

Bilbo felt wrung out to dry and experienced no shyness or shame when removing his clothes. Thorin’s clothes had been cut off in the process of being treated. Bandages strapped his shoulder to his side to avoid further injury. Below the waist still showed he was in his small clothes. Bilbo decided his own small clothes could stay on. Then he snuggled close and shivered when he felt Thorin’s cold flesh. He placed himself under Thorin’s good arm and put his head on Thorin’s chest.

“This isn’t over, Thorin Oakenshield,” he whispered. Then he yawned, and the world fell away.

Chapter End Notes

One more! I do have another couple of Bagginshield fic ideas but I can't promise it will happen. I'm frankly very surprised I got to finish something. It's been too long to be honest. I need to thank danypooh again for her amazing betaing and cheerleading!

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

> The sound of low murmuring was what greeted Thorin upon waking. He couldn't make out what was being said, he was too comfortable to care. The blankets were soft on his taut skin that felt truly warm for the first time in years. As the peaceful moments went by, Thorin' senses registered the rest of the state he was in. His shoulder ached a little along with his head, and something was tickling his nose. He snuffled and moved his head around to escape it, but the tickling only got worse. He opened his eyes and saw…

Chapter Notes

> There is some smut here but nothing too crazy!
>
> The Kitchen Thief is my next Bagginshield fic! Head on over and subscribe for future posts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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He saw…?

Thorin blinked rapidly against a weight on his side shifted–he instinctively gazed down.

Curls.

Blurry brown curls filled his vision.

Bilbo. It was Bilbo in his arms… *naked* ?

It was too much to process. He had a vague sense that he should be celebrating something, but he couldn't grasp what. Sight! He could see! A little. But that was great news! He couldn't see anything only hours ago! Had it been hours? His body felt stiff, almost as if he'd been in bed for days.

Bilbo snuggled closer, and Thorin gasped.

Bilbo !

His eyes were desperate for the sight of his One. It had been so many years since he'd last seen Bilbo–!

A wrinkled dwarven face greeted his eyes instead. Thorin reared back into his pillow as far as he could go. Oin flinched back as well and blinked at him.

"Your Majesty? Can you see me?"

Then Bilbo ripped himself away and grabbed Thorin's face, frantically searching his gaze. "Thorin?" Bilbo whispered in awe. "Your-your eyes seem… clearer. Can… can you see me?"

Thorin took Bilbo's wrists into his hands and pulled them away from his face. Then he looked directly into Bilbo's eyes and kissed each palm. He smiled when he noticed Bilbo shuddered.

"Oh, sweet gardens," Bilbo laughed breathily. "You can! You can?!" He bounced on his knees with a big grin and dove to kiss Thorin on each eyelid. When he pulled back, Bilbo was still grinning but with flowing tears.

"Everything's still… murky," Thorin admitted.

Bilbo wiped his eyes on his bare shoulder and sniffed. "But you can see."

Thorin's lips curled up, his heart full at the sight of his One. He was a little thinner than he should be, a little too pale, but his hair was long and bed-mussed, cheeks pinking with every second that passed under Thorin's unwavering stare. "I can."

"Well, then!" Oin declared with pride. "See, Master Baggins? The treatment is working. You don't need to be so embarrassed about warming the King's bed."

Bilbo gasped, scandalized, and pulled a blanket up under his arms. "That has a completely different meaning and you know it, Master Oin!"

Oin chuckled and stood from his seat. "Not that the meaning you speak of would have any drawbacks at this point. You may stir the pot as you wish now, but slowly!"

Bilbo muttered something about perverted old dwarves as Oin closed the door, leaving them alone. Thorin tried to sit up, but pain shot through his shoulder making him hiss. Bilbo placed a warm, gentle hand on Thorin's chest to settle him back down. "We've been in bed for three days," Bilbo scolded, "and you're still healing from your fall. So stay right where you are… your *Majesty* ." The last part was said with a growl. Bilbo leaned in and flicked Thorin on the nose.

"Ow!"

“I can’t believe you never told me you are a *King* , Thorin!” Bilbo’s voice got louder and higher pitched. “All those gifts every year! Bofur’s dragon was from *you!* A *king* !”

Thorin rubbed at his nose with his free hand. “Not a king anymore,” he grumbled petulantly.

Bilbo scoffed and threw his hands up. “No, you aren’t *ruling* anymore, but you can’t just stop being King! That’s not how it works!” The hobbit laughed mirthlessly. “Me. Bilbo Baggins, soul-bound to a King! Ha! And the best part is that my parents knew all along!” He glared down at Thorin and sneered. “I will have words with them when we return to Bag End, don’t you think otherwise! And you will be present while I do because there will be words for you as well!” He huffed indignantly but then soon softened. “But no more of that for now.” He went closer and hovered over Thorin with a shy smile. “You can *see* ,” he whispered happily.

Thorin couldn’t help but ask. “Are we soul-bound, then? Are we truly whole now?”

Bilbo blushed but nodded. “Yes. It seems it happened overnight. I… I haven’t left your side since… since that day.” Bilbo looked down at himself, barely covered by the blanket and reddened further. “I felt you… call for me. I thought it was a dream. So I followed your voice. Then I felt like we were…”

“One.” Thorin smiled. “I feel it.” He sighed with happiness. There was peace in his heart, a kind he’d never felt before. He reached out and tugged at Bilbo’s blanket. The hobbit had not been prepared and yelped when he was suddenly exposed. Thorin frowned when Bilbo covered his chest with his arms. “You still have pants on.”

“Of *course* I still have pants on, Thorin Oakenshield! What kind of gentlehobbit do you think I am? You, by the way, also have pants on!”

“Mahal, but he is so adorable when he is flustered,” Thorin muttered with a smirk.

Bilbo straightened, still wrapped in himself and blocking Thorin’s view. “I am *not* adorable! I am– *oomph!”* Thorin had yanked Bilbo down on top of him, forcing Bilbo to brace his arms on either side of Thorin so as not to crush him, which left Bilbo’s chest uncovered. The hobbits' breath grew shallow as Thorin looked his fill.

“Come here, my treasure,” Thorin rumbled as he wrapped his hand around Bilbo’s waist and urged him to close the distance. He chuckled a little when he heard Bilbo swallow quite loudly. “I just want to feel you against me like this.”

The hobbit lowered himself immediately, making them both release a pleased sounding noise. Thorin’s skin relished in the contact. His One’s squirming was the most delicious sensation he’d ever experienced. Once Bilbo settled, Thorin caressed his bare shoulders until his One finally relaxed. He wanted his other arm released, but he doubted that Bilbo would allow it. It didn’t matter. Having Bilbo so close and humming happily was more than anything he could have hoped for.

Slowly, his strokes grew longer and went lower. He felt Bilbo’s skin erupt in goose pimples. He continued his caress until his fingertips grazed the hem of Bilbo’s small clothes. He had no real plans when he dipped his fingers just underneath. Thorin noticed Bilbo freeze as his

touch explored, running across his lower back, into dimples and the small divot between plush cheeks. But then Bilbo let out a soft whimper, and Thorin felt him quickly harden on his thigh.

Mahal, give me strength, Thorin thought desperately.

“Bilbo?” His One tensed further and buried his face deeper between Thorin's arm and chest. He mumbled something into Thorin’s skin. He stopped his teasing to hear what his One said. “What did you say?”

Bilbo turned his face enough to repeat it. “I’m supposed to be mad at you,” he all but slurred.

“Ah.” Thorin decided this was permission to keep up what he’d been doing. “You’re saving it for later, remember?” He pushed further until his middle finger slipped into the soft place of his seam. Bilbo’s hips jerked forward before he stilled again.

“Mmm… r-right,” he replied. Bilbo’s breath quickened and his nails raked through Thorin’s chest hair as if needing to find purchase.

Thorin couldn’t take it. He slid his palm over Bilbo’s perfect backside, cupped one cheek, and squeezed. This made Bilbo jerk forward again, but harder and with a moan that curled Thorin’s toes. “Yes,” he said as he squeezed again and urged Bilbo to thrust over and over. Thorin felt himself heat from the inside, and the sweat formed on his brow. He felt consumed with the need to have Bilbo take his pleasure and spend himself on his skin. He removed his hand, eliciting a complaint from his One. “Pull them down,” he ordered quietly as he tugged Bilbo’s pants.

The hobbit complied quickly, helping Thorin slide his small clothes down just under his rear, freeing himself. He also scrambled with Thorin’s laces, but paused suddenly. “Oh,” Bilbo says sadly, “you’re not…”

Thorin cursed down at his crotch, still unmoved by the erotic turn of events. But then tilted Bilbo’s chin up to meet his gaze. “I am. Believe me when I say the spirit is very willing but… the flesh is–”

“Soft?”

Thorin barked out a laugh and listened to Bilbo’s giggles. The tension in the room had broken, but he could see Bilbo’s erection had not flagged, which was good, because Thorin’s frenzy returned. He concentrated on exuding the insatiable hunger he felt in his blood as he looked at Bilbo. It seems to work because the hobbit’s mirth died instantly, replaced by eager anticipation.

“Come here,” Thorin ordered, and Bilbo just about threw himself into Thorin’s arms, gasping when they rubbed together.

“Oh, goodness,” Bilbo said weakly and then whimpered.

The sound made something tighten in Thorin's gut, and *finally* he felt his arousal spike and pool between his own legs. "Take your pleasure," he whispered into Bilbo's ear which twitched so adorably he had to nip at it. And that made the hobbit arch and keen.

"Oh, my stars," was the last coherent thing that Thorin heard from his One before he was lost to instinct and bucks. His moans were high-pitched and matched the rhythm of his thrusts, occasionally breathing out Thorin's name in between.

The flesh might still be weak, but Thorin felt Bilbo's pleasure within himself as if it were his own, and he knew that Bilbo was just as lost in this as he was. There's confusion, discovery, elation, and so much love that they could not contain it for much longer. Bilbo's rhythm staggered and turned to frenzied, uncoordinated thrusting until he sharply cried out and quaked in Thorin's arms.

Thorin felt everything and was momentarily and happily blinded by bliss. He'd forgotten he could see when his eyes fluttered open once more. Curls again. Lovely brown curls that he had every intention of braiding as soon as possible.

Bilbo groaned but stayed limp in Thorin's embrace. "Why didn't we do that sooner?" Thorin had to smile at the drunkenness in his voice. He could sympathize. "Wait. Don't answer that. I'll only get upset again. I can't believe my mother kept this from me. Things finally make sense, though. My father's aversion to dwarves, for one." He huffed, then played with Thorin's hair, twirling a lock around his finger. "I've been… lonely."

Thorin's gut clenched. "So was I…"

"I wish you would have come for me sooner…"

And Bilbo's voice sounded so hurt that Thorin wrapped his arm around his One and squeezed, kissing the curls on his head. "I did my best, my love. I'm sorry it was not enough."

Bilbo lifted and looked into his eyes. "I'll forgive you, but you must heal completely."

Thorin grinned and confidently slid his hand back to Bilbo's bottom, pressing Bilbo closer. "Then we must spend quite a lot of time together. Are you amenable?" he purred.

"Am I–?!" Red as a tomato, Bilbo spluttered, then tried to regain some semblance of control. "I suppose I could be persuaded." He sniffed and smirked. "How many days do you think it will take? Will I come-of-age in this bed?" Bilbo laughed, but Thorin paled.

"Your birthday!"

"It's in five days! Don't tell me you regret what we just did just because–"

"No, no, of course not." Thorin cupped Bilbo's cheek. "But the celebration will be in the Shire, so we must arrange to travel."

Bilbo scoffed and crossed his arms. "Not in your condition, we're not. It would serve my parents right if I didn't attend my own party. Stuff that in your pipe and smoke it, *papa!* The

nerve of him! Taking my bargain knowing full well that I had a heartsong already!"

"He didn't believe I was telling the truth, Bilbo. He was just–"

"Don't defend him!" Bilbo hissed with real anger. "Don't you *dare* say he was just protecting me! It's not just the fact that he–" Bilbo stopped short, closed his eyes, and breathed slowly. "As I said, I will have words with him when the time comes. It's been a long time coming, to be honest."

Thorin rubbed at Bilbo's arm, trying to soothe his upset away and reassure himself at the same time. "I always meant to return to the Shire for you at your coming-of-age," he murmured. "It's all I've ever dreamed about. I've imagined it in so many different ways. I'd like to make good on my promise, Bilbo."

His One sighed and relaxed, leaning over Thorin and pressing a small kiss to his lips. "Well, how am I supposed to say no when you put it that way?"

Belladonna had thrown herself into the party preparations to not think too hard about where on middle-earth her son had gone off to. She had an inkling. She was proud of her boy, but she knew it would all come to a head once King Thorin told him the truth. She wondered how he'd take the news. She wondered if he'd blame her. Knowing her son, she already knew the answer, but she hoped that Thorin would calm his ire before Bilbo could blow his top and decide never to step foot in Bag End again. And Vallar knew Bungo would not go down without a fight. The fool of a Baggins was still all too pleased with himself for the bargain he'd struck with Bilbo.

A storm was coming though the skies were blue, and not a drop of rain would come. She almost thought Bilbo wouldn't come to his own party, but she'd received Thorin's note about attending with his family. There was not a word about Bilbo, and she was quite sure that was her son's way of saying he was not pleased.

Bungo nearly skipped to Belladonna's side as she organized the labels for the buffet. "Bella, dearest! Did you hear? Our Bilbo went to visit Salvia Littlefoot! I knew she'd be the one!"

"The one to what, dear," Belladonna said without breaking concentration to roll her eyes.

"To capture his heart, of course! I told you he just needed to meet the right lady. If that dwarf shows up–"

"He will. I received his R.S.V.P." She moved on to the table meant for drinks.

Bungo scoffed and followed his wife. "You should have told him not to bother coming. Bilbo is courting. And the fact that he couldn't keep away from Miss Littlefoot–"

Belladonna groaned and placed her fists on her hips as she whirled around to face Bungo. "I can tell you right now, with the utmost certainty, husband, that Bilbo is not in the least bit

interested in Miss Littlefoot or any other hobbit in the Shire. You are being nothing short of delusional if you think otherwise."

Her words didn't seem to deter her husband, who only smiled smugly. "You honestly think that when that dwarf gets here and tells our son he's his *One* that Bilbo is just going to swoon into his arms?" Bungo chuckled. "Bilbo has more sense than that."

Belladonna shook her head and moved on to the seating arrangements while her husband followed on bouncing steps. What was she supposed to say? *Sorry dear, but I had them meet years ago and they've kept up a correspondence, and I also believe they've been shacking up in Bree for months now. And knowing our son, he's coming to his party with that dwarf in tow to make sure he shames us before the whole of the Shire.*

"Whatever you say, dear."

The gossip vine was already climbing to peaks unknown by the time Bilbo showed up at his coming-of-age party. He was only just in time for his own speech! And Belladonna made sure to take a seat as close to the stage as possible. Her son's face held no secrets. Well, she decided, if she was going to suffer his wrath, then she was going to do it with dignity. She only hoped the pending argument with her husband wasn't too bad later. Bungo sat beside her with a half-pint of ale and handed his wife a cider. Belladonna took her drink and downed it in one go.

Bungo's eyes widened. "Bella, that was for the toast!"

She let out a belch and swiveled her head to face her husband. " *De-lu-sion-al.* " she whispered, then turned back to watch her son.

Bilbo refused to meet his parents' eyes. His rage would boil over if he had to see them smiling at him like everything was right with the world. As if they hadn't lied to him his entire life! No. Instead, he kept his eyes on the far back, where his heartsong stood surrounded by family. Someone called for attention as he clinked his fork to his glass. Everyone quieted down. Thorin nodded, and Bilbo finally spoke.

"Esteemed Hobbits, thank you for coming to my coming-of-age birthday party!" Everyone cheered. "This is the only home I've ever known, and I'm grateful to have grown up amongst you all. You've all taught me so much." Everyone awed and cooed. "Not all good things, mind." Some laughed and others bristled. "No, not good at all. For instance, one would think every hobbit is a world-class chef with the way they stir the pot around here with gossip!" Not so many laughs now. "Always judging our neighbors, our own friends, about who they marry or who is queer for whatever made-up reason you all think of."

"Bilbo!" Bungo hissed nearby, but Bilbo turned to him with fire in his eyes.

“My own father is terrified of being shamed more than he has been.” Bilbo shook his head and pointed at his mother. “He was shamed for marrying my mother, all because she had dared go on adventures!” Then he pointed to himself. “They were both shamed for only having one child! And they were shamed again when I turned out to be *odd* . Well,” he turned to his father again and shrugged, “I’m sorry father, but I’m about to shame you again.” Bilbo reached out his hand to someone in the far back.

Bungo collapsed in his chair when he saw the dwarf king walking with the aid of another. The king barely looked like himself, but it had to be him, for who else would it be? Bungo had so many questions, and he feared he was about to get all the answers in front of everyone present. The king was helped onto the stage, and he witnessed his son take his hand, entwining their fingers.

“Oh, no,” he breathed, panic settling in his bones until he began to sweat.

“King Thorin, son of Thrain, son of Thror, King Under the Mountain, is my heartsong.”

It was lucky Bungo was already sitting. He swayed into his wife who had been ready to catch him. “What’s he doing? What’s happening? How could this happen?”

“I’m sorry, dear,” Belladonna whispered. “I only did what was best for our son.”

Bungo whirled around. “You did this?”

Belladonna narrowed her eyes. “Did you really want the blood of that dwarf on our hands? Look at him! Look at what this has done to him. And Bilbo was suffering, and you know it! I am sorry that it had to be this way, but I would do it again if given the choice.”

Bungo shot out of his chair and stumbled back. He turned to face his son who was standing in front of the dwarf as if to shield him. “You cheated!” He shouted at the king. “We had an agreement!”

Before the king could retort, Belladonna shouted. “The agreement was that he keep away from the Shire until Bilbo’s coming-of-age.”

“Oh! So you just found a loophole?” Bungo exclaimed, furious and hurt. “You betrayed me!”

“What?” Belladonna reared back as if slapped.

“You betrayed me,” Bungo repeated. “And you cheated!”

Belladonna recovered from her shock and turned red with fury. She stomped up to her husband and pointed at their son. “I was unaware that the life of our son was a *game* to you, Bungo Baggins! I *told* you this is how things would turn out. I *told* you heartsongs were real. Would you really risk our only son’s life just to prove you are right?”

Bungo inhaled shakily. No, he would not do that to his boy. He just wanted Bilbo to have a full life, not influenced by some destiny that a random dwarf dictated. He wanted to keep his son from the same shame that had been cast on him since the day he married Belladonna Took. The love of his life. His… heartsong–if he believed in such things.

He looked at his son and then at the dwarf king, so changed since the day they met. He really was fading. And now that Bungo's eyes were truly open, he had to admit that his son had been miserable. He'd hoped it was the wanderlust, that it had nothing to do with the dwarf. But seeing them together now, hand in hand, he knew he'd been wrong all along. What they shared, it was clear in their eyes, was something special–something he had experienced himself.

"Right," said Bungo, clearing his throat. He climbed up the stage and addressed the silent crowd. "My son has found his heartsong! And that's quite a special thing! So let's pick up our glasses and toast to Bilbo and-and Thorin! To their health and happiness!"

"To their health and happiness," the crowd repeated lamely.

What a disaster , Bungo thought. *Oh well, at least my wedding will no longer be the scandal of the century.*

It wasn't until they arrived at Bag End, reasonably sozzled and exhausted both physically and emotionally, that Bilbo decided to scold them all.

He swayed while standing, and slurred through righteous speech as he waved wide emphatic arms to accentuate his point.

"You are my father!"

"Yes."

"You should care more about-about *me* than you do about any o' *them!"*

"Yes."

"You hate me don't you?" Bilbo sobbed out. "You hate me now because I chose a dwarf. A *male* . Because-because I'm-I'm not ever going to marry *properly* in your eyes. Because I won't have any *fauntlings* and Bag End will end up with the *Sackville* -Bagginses!"

Thorin stood before Bungo could and went to Bilbo. "I will buy back your beloved home for you from these Sackville-Bagginses or die trying, my love."

And that made Bilbo giggle through his tears. It was then that Bungo truly realized how wrong he had been. Anyone could see it. They were One.

Bungo stood and walked to his son, then placed his hands on his shoulders. "I don't hate you. Honestly, I still feel like I did my best with what I knew. I just wish I hadn't done to you what

my father did to me. It's… disappointing." He smiled wistfully at his boy and embraced him. "But I love you. You're my boy. All I want is for you to be happy."

Poor Bilbo shook in his father's arms, and Bungo had to acknowledge he had done significant damage for his son to behave as if this was some great news.

Bilbo could hardly believe the night he'd experienced. It was certainly a birthday that he'd never forget. And still, surprises kept coming. Thorin was in his bed. *Thorin* was *in* his *bed* . In his bed in Bag End *naked* , the shameless dwarf. Little did his dwarf know how many fantasies Bilbo had pleasured himself to while thinking of said dwarf. But this was *real* .

"Bilbo, remove that ridiculous garment at once and come here," Thorin grumbled.

Bilbo gasped with mock outrage. "This nightgown was tailored specifically for me. I picked the fabric myself!"

Thorin pouted, and Bilbo found it so funny he couldn't bite back his laugh.

"Don't look at me like that," he whined as he pulled off his nightgown. They'd been sleeping in the same bed, mostly naked for days, and Bilbo was still shy about this part. He wondered if it would always be a novelty.

Thorin smiled and lifted the covers. Bilbo got in first and Thorin after. As Thorin murmured some words in Khuzdul, Bilbo shivered in his arms, his back to Thorin's chest–Thorin mouthing the foreign tongue into his sensitive ear.

And Bilbo may not have understood the words, but he did understand the sentiment of each one.

"I love you, my One, my treasure of all treasures. I will always love you. I am yours. You are mine. Tell me that you are mine."

"I am," Bilbo breathed, "I am yours. Please…" he couldn't bring himself to say the rest, so he pushed his rear back into Thorin's arousal. It was hard and thick, leaving a delicious slide of slick on his skin.

There were long moments of agony wrapped up into pleasure, so interlocked that Bilbo wondered if he weren't just dreaming this incredible scenario. But it felt too real–too *much* . And then they were physically One, rocking together gently, professing their love and promises with every broken word, every stuttered breath, and every stolen kiss.

Bilbo hadn't known he'd cried out, feeling like his soul had become too big for his small body–needing an outlet, needing to spread out into the stars only to crash back down with a dizzying force. Somewhere down below the clouds was Thorin's shout of pleasure, giving Bilbo's pride a long and loving stroke.

“I’m going to get you so fat, Thorin Oakenshield.”

Thorin chuckled and pressed a sweet kiss to his One’s lips. “I suppose that’s not the strangest thing that could be said after coupling.”

Bilbo swatted his arm and lunged for another kiss. “I love you.”

Thorin brushed back the braids he’d put in his One’s hair, the ones that spoke clearly of his devotion and love. “And I you, my treasure.”

Even with all the pain he’d endured, Thorin could not regret a moment. His One had accepted him, bonded with him, and loved him. There was still much to discuss regarding their future, but that could wait. Nothing was more important than healing each other’s wounds caused by time and distance. And their bond would be sung in songs and told in stories for years to come.

Chapter End Notes

The Kitchen Thief is my next Bagginshield fic! Head on over and subscribe for future posts.

Thank you all SO much for reading and commenting! Hope to see you in the next one!

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