Shamed and Shorn

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Shamed and Shorn

by mordelle

Summary

One day he'd been dying at age one-hundred-ninety-five, and the next he'd woken up just turning two-hundred and two.
Seven years dead.
Seven years lost in darkness and not even knowing it.
Dain was King.
Thorin was not.

Notes

I'm sorry. I tried to stop myself. I really did. I just couldn't get this out of my head. I expect more will come but I don't know how often. Trying to just ride the inspiration. No big plot here, just going with the flow until these boys get together.

Chapter 1

The bedchamber, while not his old rooms, was still grand by any standard. The dwarves of Erebor were renowned for their craftsmanship, and it was evident in every corner of the room. Heavy tapestries adorned the walls, depicting legendary battles of dwarves and dragons, the stitching intricate and precise. The stonework was impeccable, with runes carved into the walls and ceiling, each one telling a story, each one a symbol of their proud heritage. The bed was a large, sturdy thing, carved from the same stone as the mountain itself, and it was draped in fine furs. The room was opulent, but they were not Thorin's. He'd never stepped in this room before–hadn't even known it existed. The royal chambers, however, *those* rooms were occupied by the *new* rulers of Erebor, King Dain and his family. *This* was a room for whoever was deemed an important visitor. Fitting for the former king, for he was now a stranger among his own people–a stranger to himself even.

He'd come to that concussion easily enough considering the circumstances. Thorin was no longer King Under the Mountain, and he never would be again… because he'd died.

Thorin stood before the mirror, staring at his pale and scarred reflection. He was unused to the face that stared back, gaunt, with wrinkles more defined, new scars, and more silver in his hair. After all, one day he'd been dying at age one-hundred-ninety-five, and the next he'd woken up just turning two-hundred and two.

Seven years dead.

Seven years lost in darkness and not even knowing it.

Dain was King.

Thorin was not.

He was dressed in plain robes that he's paid a servant to acquire in secret, and they hung loosely on his now much thinner frame. Ever since waking from Stone Sleep only weeks prior, his appetite had yet to go back to how it was *before* . In fact, nothing had been the same since. He reached up to touch his graying beard, what was supposed to be the proud symbol of his kingship that had grown as he Slept, and sighed. He would be shorn of it entirely, a symbol of his shame and his failures, not only as King, but as a dwarf.

He closed his eyes, steeling himself for what was to come. He thought of his nephews, Fili and Kili, lost in battle, and of the weight of his responsibility as their king and uncle. They had been young and full of life, eager to fight for the future of their people. And now they are gone. Not for the first time, Thorin wonders why Mahal chose him and not his boys to return. He did not deserve a second chance at life or of so-called redemption.

Ah. Maybe it was punishment, after all. His sister-sons called home to the halls of their ancestors and Thorin made to Wake and toil in his guilt for years to come. Tears pricked at the corners of Thorin's eyes as he remembered the laughter and joy of his nephews. They had

been his family, his only family since the death of his parents and the loss of his brother. And he had failed them, failing to protect them from the dangers of the quest.

He thought of his sister, who he could not face no matter how often he was told that she eagerly awaited his return to the Blue Mountains. It would be too much to bear. Dis, had lost everyone, including Thorin. Now her brother had returned to the living. It would be too cruel to return to her as he was.

And then he thought of Bilbo, the hobbit who had been his unexpected friend and ally. He remembered the warmth of Bilbo's smile, and the twinkle in his eyes, and he felt a pang of longing. He had loved Bilbo, and he still did, but he knew Bilbo thought him dead. He should probably stay dead. He was a shamed dwarf, unworthy of love and affection. And anyway, showing up randomly at the Hobbit's door would probably give him quite the fright–to say the least.

He should stay away.

He really should.

But he knew he would not–*could not.*

Thorin opened his eyes, looking once more into the mirror. He saw the sadness and regret in his own eyes, and he knew that it was time. He took a deep breath, then reached for the shears, and began to cut off chunks of his beard. With each snip of the shears, he felt a piece of himself falling away, until he was left with a shorn face, stripped of his pride. A sharp, plain knife smoothed away the rest–not even stubble left behind. His long wavy locks were supposed to be next, but he hesitated. Shaving the hair on his face was enough–everyone who mattered would know what it meant. The hair on his head could stay, he decided, unbraided and unadorned to show he was no one of significance. Because he wasn't. Not anymore.

As he stood there, staring at the complete stranger before him, he felt the tears rolling down his naked cheeks, stinging and silent. He did not mourn the beard. He mourned the loss of his nephews, the loss of his people, and the loss of himself. He felt like a broken thing, unworthy of the title or the respect he once commanded.

The bare face in the reflection steeled, and the tears were wiped away.

The once former King Under the Mountain stepped away from the mirror, donned his traveling cloak and pulled up the hood. He gave one last look to the letters he'd left his friends and kin, grabbed his pack, and stomped over his shame left on the stone floors to a secret door near his chambers that would lead him out of Erebor unseen.

Thorin stepped out into the bright sunlight, blinking in the light after spending so much time in the darkness of the mountain. He had never realized just how beautiful the world was, how much color and life there was outside the gold and silver halls of Erebor. It was almost blinding. He had always been so focused on reclaiming the Lonely Mountain, he had never

taken the time to simply enjoy the world around him. Now, as he gazed out at the vast horizon before him, he felt a sense of awe and wonder… of… freedom.

No name.

No title.

No purpose… save one.

All he was certain of was the pull towards the Shire, towards Bilbo–his One. He didn't know what he would say or do when he got there, but there would be plenty of time to figure it out before he got there. Thorin felt a desperate need to see the hobbit, to apologize and make things right. He only hoped that Bilbo would forgive him for returning to him, that the hobbit would still remember him with some fondness–enough to allow Thorin to redeem himself. And so Thorin walked, feeling lost and alone, but also feeling a glimmer of hope. Perhaps this journey would lead him to what he was searching for, perhaps he could finally find some peace.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

So CW: Description of being inside a tomb and panicking about it in the very beginning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing he notices is a slow thudding sound in his ears, like a war drum, steady and loud until the silence between the drums grows shorter and shorter. His breath is shallow and matches the rhythm of the constant thump-thump. His eyes snap open, but his vision is blinded by a bright light. He can't see, he can't hear anything but his own frantic heart. He can't feel anything except a terrible coldness that seems to come from within his very bones. Panic grips him as he struggles to sit up, his mind racing with the fear of not knowing where he is. But he can scarcely move.

He is trapped.

His senses tell him he is encased in stone. Had there been a cave in? How did he get here? He tries to recall where he could be. His eyes finally seem to adjust somewhat and he looks down only to behold the Arkenstone in his very hands. He squints and blinks in wonder, watching the stones' beautiful light dance on the walls of his… tomb.

He remembers now–memories coming all in flashes. He was dying. Bilbo was there. Thorin had died. The last thing he'd heard were Bilbo's pleas, reassurances, and sobs. He'd died. But… he is now alive. He must be because he can still feel his racing heart trying valiantly to escape his chest.

Bilbo… where is Bilbo…?

He tries to shout for help, but his voice comes out as a whisper, barely audible. Thorin's heart is pounding as he gropes around in the darkness, trying to find something, anything, to hold onto that isn't the cursed stone he is buried with.

Suddenly, he hears a faint humming sound, and he freezes. It is coming from somewhere close, but he can't tell where. Then he notices that the runes on the walls of the tomb are glowing with an eerie blue light. Thorin's eyes widen as he realizes what is happening. The magic of the tomb is activating, and he is the one it is meant for.

The humming grows louder, and the air seems to grow colder. Thorin's breath is visible now, and he shivers in the icy chill. The runes on the walls glow brighter. Then a scraping sound, and the heavy stone slab on his coffin moves. Thorin watches the lid slide away, revealing the darkness outside his former prison.

He tries to get up, but he is too weak. His limbs feel heavy, and his body is numb.

“Ihsî,” he finally rasps. “He-lp…” A little louder. “Ihsî!!” Then all goes black.

...

No one breathes a word of Thorin’s return outside the royal quarters. He’s poked and prodded and endlessly questioned.

Oin is ghostly pale when he approaches and his cousin, King Dain, dithers nearby with his jaw slack. “Are you Durin returned?”

He could lie. He could say yes and regain his kingdom and more. He could return to Bilbo a king once again with absolutely everything to offer.

“No.”

Dain takes a step closer and their eyes lock, searching. “It really is you, Thorin?”

He nods once.

“Oh, Mahal–” a choked sob interrupts a voice Thorin has been waiting to hear. The small crowd clears and there is Balin with his mane whiter than ever. “My lad…” He rushes to Thorin and wraps him in his arms.

Thorin tries to embrace him but only manages one arm to gently graze Balin’s shoulder before it drops to his side again. It felt good to be touched with warmth and love as opposed to being poked about like he was some kind of experiment. “Balin, why has this happened to me?”

His father figure leaned back and sat on the edge of his bed in a room he did not recognize. “I was hoping you’d have the answer to that?”

“Could it have been the Arkenstone?”

Everyone in the room glanced at one another and murmured. Balin shook his head. “We don’t know. This has happened before, as you know, but before your grandfather held the stone, it had been part of the mountain. It could be that the stone has been the reason for these… things all along.”

Thorin nodded and frowned. “I am not well, my friend.”

“I know, lad. I know. It’s all right. We’ll figure this out.” He pats Thorin on the shoulder and squeezes reassuringly.

He’s been trying to hold back, but the burning question in his heart aches to know. “How is Bilbo?”

The room goes quiet, and then dwarves are quickly exiting the room at Dain's insistence that have only one visitor at a time. The door closes and Balin looks back to Thorin and smiles. "He is well, last I heard. We've kept a correspondence, and I had planned to visit the Shire at some point."

Thorin smiled, the first in this new life. "So, he went back to his books and armchair, after all."

Balin huffed out a laugh. "Aye, he did. He said you told him to. Dying wish, it sounded like, too!"

He frowned thoughtfully. "I did tell him to. I'm glad he did. Is he…" Thorin swallowed, suddenly parched, "Is he happy?"

A long sigh escaped his friend. "He admits to getting restless at times, blames us and wizards for it." He chuckles then, but when it dies off, Balin gets a concerned look in his eye. "Are you going to tell him?"

Thorin looks away. "I think you know exactly what I'm going to do."

"Dain will give you the throne–"

"No!" Thorin shouts and snaps his glare to Balin. "I do not want it. I am not well, Balin. I can hear the gold calling to me in seductive whispers. And I am not… I am not… who I once was." Nothing could be more true than this. "Something has changed within me and I know not if it is for the better or worse." He looks at his friend again and reaches out. Balin takes his hand in both of his. "My life is tied to Bilbo Baggins. He is my One. I would have kept him by my side had I not lost myself to the sickness… had I lived."

"You do live, Thorin–"

"Aye, and I will not waste a moment of the extra breaths I've been given. I will make amends. I will spend the rest of my days under green hills and flowers if he will have me. You cannot change my mind and I ask you now, my friend, that you tell no one else I live. Not even Dis."

Balin grimaced. "I'm afraid it's too late for that. Dain sent a raven to your sister hours ago."

"Fuck."

It was too risky to enter Dale, dwarrows just about everywhere, because of their tradings with the men. Lake Town was only a little better, but he needed more food for the road. It was likely his last chance to sleep in a real bed until he reached the Shire, though he had thought about stopping at Beorn's. He knew the Skinchanger would keep his secrets, having no interest in the world outside his lands. But staying there would mean confronting more memories of his failings. That was probably a good reason to go–to face his mistakes and lost

opportunities. He still had time to decide, but Thorin had a feeling he would see the old bear again.

As he walked to his next destination, his mind wandered back to the Shire and to Bilbo's cozy home, as it usually did. He could almost smell the scent of the fireplace and feel the warmth of the hearth. It was hard to believe that all of that was now long in the past. For Thorin, it felt like only months ago… and yet ages ago as well. He wasn't the same dwarf anymore. Thorin sighed heavily, feeling a sense of emptiness that he couldn't quite explain. For the first time in a long time, he had no responsibilities, no expectations to fulfill. It was liberating, yet at the same time, it made him feel lost. Bilbo probably wasn't the same hobbit either. Surely, the journey and years had changed his friend as well.

Thorin put those thoughts away as he approached Lake Town. He took a deep breath and tried to push down the memories of his past life. His long and disheveled hair helped hide his face from some curious eyes. He certainly didn't want to draw any attention to himself.

He walked through the town, taking in the sights and sounds around him. Again, he mused briefly on how everything seemed so much… *more* than how he remembered it.

The smell of smoke and the sound of hammers hitting anvils filled the air, and Thorin couldn't help but feel a pang of nostalgia. No doubt there would be a dwarf in the smithy, and so he steered clear.

Spotting a small inn on the edge of town, he headed towards it. As he entered, he was greeted by the warmth of the fire and the smell of roasted meat. He took a seat at a table in the room's darkest corner and waited for the innkeeper to approach him. Thorin needed little to sustain himself, and a warm bed and a hot meal would be more than enough. He struck a bargain with the man–repair services for a bed, a meal, and rations for travel. If he finished everything quickly, he'd even be paid some coin. That sounded more than enough to Thorin, who'd left his home with nothing for the second time around, except he didn't have a name now. It would have been helpful, Thorin thought too late, to have come up with one along the way.

"What shall I call you, Master Dwarf?" Asked the man.

"Durj." Thorin replied while valiantly withholding from rolling his eyes at his own lack of creativity. Thorin would later regret choosing the name Stranger as his new moniker, no matter how fitting it was.

As he worked on the repairs around the inn, Thorin couldn't help but muse on the simplicity of his new life. He didn't have the weight of a kingdom on his shoulders, and he could focus on the work in front of him without worrying about the politics and the alliances that came with being… who he was once. No worries of dragons either. Thorin's hands moved deftly, hammering away at the broken door hinges and securing them back in place. It was honest work, and he felt a sense of satisfaction as each task came to its completion.

This was not like so long ago, when he resented toiling in the world of men as a mere blacksmith. He had no one else to feed but himself. And the only reason he ate at all was to

gain the strength to reach Bilbo. The kind of work he did was a clean means to an end. An end Thorin was both dreading and looking forward to.

The hours passed quickly, and before he knew it, the list of repairs were done. Thorin stepped back to admire his handiwork. The door was now fixed, and it looked stronger than it had before. He felt a sense of accomplishment, but at the same time, he felt morose that the work was over. It had done such a good job of keeping his bleak thoughts at bay for a while. At least the innkeeper was quite pleased and gave him leave to pack extra food for his journey the next day.

As he settled into a small room for the night, he couldn't help but think of Bilbo once again. He wished he had something, anything, to hold on to, a reminder of the hobbit's presence in his life–another reason to stop by Beorn’s. But for now, all he had were memories, and he clung to them tightly as he drifted off into a restless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I'm feel so angstyyyyy I'm sorry if it was too much! I'm trying to keep it as light as I can.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> okay so i guess I already lied because there is a cliffhanger in this one. Also, thank you for the kudos and comments! They really make my day. I've started the PMDD symptoms already so I don't know how reliable I'll be. But if you haven't read my other fics or original stories, gives those a try in the meantime?

The road to recovery was tedious and too slow for Thorin's liking. He felt like he was running out of time, that he would be too late to make amends… too late to ask Bilbo if he ever felt the same… if they'd ever had a chance.

Thorin turns to Balin with a concerned expression etched onto his face. "Balin? In your correspondence with Master Baggins, has he ever mentioned…" he pauses, swallowing nervously, "has he ever married? Has he made a new family of his own in these years?"

Balin leans forward, his eyes scanning the parchment in his hand, still looking for clues in the past over why Thorin may have returned. "No, I can't say that he has. He describes himself as a confirmed bachelor. So now that I think of it, I'm not sure what that means." He looks up at Thorin, a hint of worry creasing his brow. "Thorin, are you sure you know what you're doing? Our burglar held you in high regard, but did he ever say anything? Did you?"

Thorin shakes his head, his gaze falling to the ground. "No. I was waiting until… Until everything was settled, but then… and after everything that's happened, I'm not sure he will have me. But I must try."

Balin places a hand on Thorin's shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze. "It's been seven years, Thorin. The life of a hobbit is not as long as dwarves. He's mourned you. Whatever feelings he had then…"

Thorin interrupts, determination flashing in his eyes. "I know. But as I said, I must try."

As Thorin stepped out of the Inn, he realized that time had passed quicker than he had expected. The sun had already begun to set, and the sky was painted in hues of orange and pink. He felt a sense of urgency to find a place to rest for the night before the darkness set in.

Thorin took a deep breath and looked towards the Mirkwood forest. Memories of his last encounter with the elves flooded his mind, and he shuddered at the thought of being

imprisoned again. Besides, he was alone and didn't have the strength to fight off spiders or any other dangers that lurked in the forest. It would take him longer to get to his destination, but it was safer than going through it. He started walking, his mind wandering as he went. He thought about his past, his mistakes, and his regrets.

Brooding, Bilbo had called it.

Thorin's worry had yet to break its hold. He couldn't shake the feeling that Bilbo had truly moved on from their… friendship, and that he would find him with someone else. The thought made him uneasy and he couldn't help but wonder if his memories of shared moments between him and Bilbo had happened as he had once believed.

If Bilbo had moved on, if he had found someone else to confide in and share his adventures with–someone who truly loved him and treated him far better than Thorin ever did, then… then Thorin would be happy for him. He would have to be, but not before finally saying his piece… what he should have said when he'd been dying on Raven Hill.

Thorin's heart felt heavy as he thought. He hadn't wanted to burden Bilbo with his feelings and then leave him–it would have been too cruel. But no matter how happy he'd be for Bilbo, the thought of his One sharing himself with someone else made Thorin feel jealous and pathetic.

Thorin knew that he had made mistakes in the past, that his stubbornness had caused him to push Bilbo away. And then the gold sickness. And the ramparts. But he had to try. Didn't he?

"You are scaring my ponies," a deep voice rumbled, "Dead One."

Thorin turned swiftly, hand going to his unnamed blade, but he lost his balance. A large, rough hand snatched him up like he weighed nothing but a raven's feather. He was brought face to face with whom he had sought. "Beorn," Thorin breathed, "it is, I–"

The skin changer brought him closer still and sniffed him with a frown, and he let out a growl. "I went to your funeral."

Thorin swallowed harshly, gripping Beorn's furry fingers and then giving his hand a tap. "Put me down and I will explain." He mused at the opportunity to practice how his return would go with Bilbo. He doubted the hobbit would be as calm as the shapeshifter.

Beorn set him down surprisingly gently, for which Thorin was grateful. He'd clearly underestimated his lack of strength. "Speak. I will hear you." With that, the skin changer walked on ahead and Thorin followed.

Thorin told him as much as he could, revealing none of the dwarves' secrets. He certainly didn't want Beorn to think they thought the Arkenstone could bring someone back to life. Already too many wondered, and it would make that blasted stone even more valuable than it already was–priceless.

As the fire crackled and popped in the cozy den, the tension between the dwarf king and the shapeshifter was palpable. Beorn's eyes flickered with a knowing gleam as he addressed

Thorin, his voice deep and rumbling like distant thunder. "So the legends are true, then? Durin's folk can cheat death."

Thorin, ever the proud and stoic dwarf, bristled slightly at the question. "I wouldn't say cheat death... We call it Stone Sleep." He explained, his voice laced with a hint of defensiveness. "It was thought that perhaps because our ancestors came from stone that those buried too soon would heal within their stone tombs. Others think that because we are descendants of Durin the Deathless, that we are sent back to fulfill our purpose in order to redeem our souls."

Beorn's eyes narrowed slightly as he listened, his massive frame towering over the dwarf king like the great bear he was. "Really? You were buried with the Arkenstone. I remember. Perhaps the stone has some magic and you're telling the other stories to keep me from knowing the truth."

Thorin's response was cautious, measured. "We do not know for sure. And I think you know what would happen if others thought the Arkenstone held such power. That will bring everyone in Arda to come after the stone through your lands."

Beorn grunted in agreement, his eyes flickering over Thorin's figure as he spoke. "Do not worry, Dead One. I will keep your secrets."

Thorin bristled at the nickname, his eyes flashing with a spark of anger. "I am no longer dead."

Beorn merely chuckled, unimpressed. "Then why do you smell of it?" he asked, his voice teasing. Thorin was taken aback. But before he could respond, the shapeshifter went on. "It’s not so strong. But it is there. Anyway, what is your purpose now? How must you redeem your soul?"

Thorin hesitated for a moment, mind still stuck on the fact that may reek of death, then decided on a half-truth. "I am traveling west."

Beorn raised an eyebrow, his expression skeptical. "Oh. So you're going after the bunny. That is good."

Thorin's surprise was evident. "How did you... Why do you say so?"

Beorn merely fixed him with a knowing stare. "Anyone with eyes could see the love you too felt for each other."

Thorin felt his face heat. “Not everyone,” he grumbled in his denial.

Beorn nodded and chuckled. "You're right. Neither you nor the bunny did. But he will be happy to see you."

Thorin's heart swelled with hope at the shapeshifter's words. "Do you think so? Even after all these years? He would have mourned me already and taken another. And how do you know Bilbo reciprocated my feelings?"

Beorn shook his head, a wry smile playing at his lips. "Oh please, if my eyes weren't enough, my nose sure as hell was. The smell of arousal between the both of you anytime you would stand next to each other or look at each other was suffocating."

Thorin would have been embarrassed or insulted had he not been absolutely delighted to hear the news. He was left speechless, his heart soaring with newfound hope and joy. The thought of seeing Bilbo again after all these years filled him with a sense of longing and anticipation that left his heart racing. And with Beorn's words ringing in his ears, he knew he had to find the hobbit and tell him the truth, no matter the cost.

Thorin hid his smile in his ale and changed the subject. “I must admit that my journey has taken its toll on me. I was wondering if it would be possible to spend the night here in your comfortable abode once more?"

Beorn stroked his beard thoughtfully, "Hmmm...one night? No." Before Thorin could feel any insult, Beorn added. “You must stay at least a week.”

Thorin's eyes widened in surprise. "A week? That's excessive, don't you think?"

Beorn shook his head. "Not at all. It is a long way to your bunny. And you are too weak and skinny to make it in one piece. You need rest and nourishment before you embark on your journey."

Thorin bristled at the suggestion that he was weak, but it was true. “I wish to see Bilbo as soon as possible before my kin try to search for me– *if* they search for me.” And they’d better not, if they knew what was good for them.

Beorn chuckled, "Yes, but trust me, a week under my care will do you good."

Thorin grudgingly agreed, realizing that Beorn was right. "Very well, a week."

The week passed by in a blur for Thorin, who spent most of his time re-training his body and eating. His sleep was fitful, if he slept at all–he was cold. He was always cold. At first, Thorin struggled to eat anything, but Beorn was not one to take no for an answer. He would sit by Thorin and stare at him until Thorin finally relented.

Slowly but surely, Thorin's strength increased, and he filled out his clothes a bit more. Beorn was pleased enough with his progress to let him leave with a pony and more food than Thorin thought the beast could carry. After saying his farewells, Thorin stopped by Beorn’s oak and picked up an acorn, placing it in a pocket by his heart.

Thorin traveled for weeks, making as brief stops as necessary. He had decided to avoid Rivendell, not wanting to risk running into any elves or other unwanted company. Instead, he worked in the towns of men along the way, doing odd jobs for food and a place to sleep. He

traveled through all kinds of weather. Despite the harsh conditions, Thorin's body was no longer used to, he pushed on. He knew he'd lost the little weight he'd gained at Beorn's and did not eat as many meals as he should have. But he kept himself focused, his mind set on his ultimate goal.

Get to his burglar.

On such a long journey, there are bound to be a few challenges. Thorin had to deal with two starving Goblins who had tried to ambush him, but they were easy enough to dispatch, much smaller and weaker than he. He was quite certain he'd caught a cold at some point, coughing and feeling chills on and off. Still, he pressed on.

The closer he got to the farthings, the more desperate he became, the faster his legs took him despite the agony they were in, and the blisters on his feet. Finally, finally, *finally* Thorin reached the Shire.

He waited out of sight until dark, not wanting to attract any attention from the curious hobbits. He walked through the winding dirt paths, his feet finding their way without him having to think about it. He did not lose his way this time.

As he approached a familiar round green door, his heart quickened. This was it. He had made it back. Thorin took a deep breath and knocked on the door. It was a long moment before he heard quiet footsteps on the other side and some grumbling about it being too late for guests. "I was just about to have dinner so if you would kindly…" and then the door slowly opened.

Thorin held his breath.

There was Bilbo. Annoyed, but holding a polite smile while in a dressing down and loose, soft pajamas, with the glow from his smial illuminating the curls on his head like some ethereal, beautiful creature.

Bilbo's eyes widened and his jaw grew slack. "... kindly… um… I'm sorry," he trailed off and the hobbit's breathing turned shallow. "Who… what…" Bilbo raised a finger and pointed it at Thorin, his eyes glazed over entirely with confusion and recognition all at once. "You… who…"

It didn't seem like Bilbo would recover fast enough, so Thorin aided him. "Master Bur–" Thorin didn't get to finish, because at the sound of his voice, Bilbo flinched back so quickly he lost his balance, crashing onto the floor with a terrified scream.

Well, thought Thorin, this was probably as bad a reaction as he had imagined he'd get.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

On the ground and desperately trying to distance himself from Thorin, Bilbo exclaimed, "No, no, no, you're dead! You're supposed to be dead. I saw you, I saw you die–you died. You died in my arms! He died in my arms. You cannot be him."

"Bilbo," Thorin called out calmly.

"No!" Bilbo's breathing was heavy and erratic, and he was in the throes of a full-blown panic. "This cannot be!" His hysterics escalated into laughter. "All these years of being called Mad Baggins and I find it is true I am, after all!"

"You are not mad, Master Baggins." Thorin's voice was soft, trying to ease Bilbo's fear. "I thought about sending word beforehand, but I didn't know how to explain. I couldn't risk–" he trailed off, unable to finish his sentence.

Bilbo chuckled, his eyes shining with crazed amusement. "He thought to write ahead," he said, "the wraith of my dead friend before me thought to write ahead! How considerate," then all amusement was gone when Bilbo's face morphed back into horror. "And yet he did not write ahead to warn me of my loss of sanity!"

Thorin's voice was low and measured. "Would you have truly believed the words on paper if you cannot believe me now?"

Bilbo stared at him, his expression incredulous. He shook his head slowly, tears glittering in his eyes. "This cannot be," he murmured, his voice barely above a whisper. "This cannot be."

Thorin's very soul was weary as he spoke. "I assure you it is. You have every reason, and every right to turn me away, but I hope you will not because I am very weary from my journey to come see you. I know I do not deserve it, but I beg you to not turn me away."

"Who are you?" Bilbo demanded, his voice rising.

"You know who I am–"

Bilbo clapped his hands over his ears, his shrieking voice filled with desperation. "No! I will not hear your lies! I will not! You're not real. You're not him. Get out! Get-out-get-out-get-out–!"

Thorin was overcome by the weight of his weakened state. The toll it had taken on him was finally becoming too much to bear. Each denial that passed Bilbo's lips was like a piercing lance through his heart. He started to lean and sway, his energy quickly draining to nothing. He had anticipated this outcome, of course. How else was Bilbo to react when the once Very Dead King Under the Mountain arrived at the hobbit's doorstep eight years later? The scene

was an overwhelming one, and Thorin was not surprised that his body would give out. The sight of Bilbo's utter terror had been the final straw. His vision darkened, and soon all he could do was utter a faint whisper of "please" before the darkness overtook him.

Thorin's eyes fluttered open, and he was momentarily disoriented. The flickering light of candles and the warmth of a crackling fire illuminated the room, casting eerie shadows that resembled the nightmares he had experienced during his fitful sleep. However, it only took a moment for him to remember where he'd been… at Bilbo's door.

As he turned his head to look around the room, he felt a wave of dizziness. Bilbo sat on the floor nearby, hugging his legs to himself and appearing smaller than Thorin remembered him being. The hobbit looked pale and distraught, and Thorin could tell that he had been crying. The hobbit's puffy red-rimmed eyes were locked, unblinkingly, on Thorin's chest, and Thorin gazed down at himself. He was surprised to find his chest was exposed, his tunic cut down the middle to fully show the hideous scar of Azog's fatal blow.

"I've been staring at you for hours," Bilbo's words were whispered in the silence, raw and weak. "And I still can't believe it's you."

Something in Thorin told him to hold his tongue, that the hobbit had not finished. Instead, he listened, vowing not to say a word until Bilbo said his piece, and let his eyes take in the love of his life. The poor hobbit's hair was a raven's nest of curls standing on end in all directions, like he'd tugged at it for as many hours as he'd spent staring at Thorin's scar. The dressing gown was the exact one he'd seen him in the first time he came to Bag End. Those soft pajamas hung a little loose on his hobbit, which made him look even more alluring. Thorin just wanted to pick Bilbo up and cradle him to his beating heart, and his hands trembled with the *need* of it. But he stayed still and quiet.

After a long moment, Bilbo continued, still staring at Thorin but unseeing. "I had to swear my neighbor to secrecy and drag him over here to tell me if he, too, saw a dwarf face first on the newly polished floors of my foyer." A mirthless, breathy laugh escaped the hobbit's lips. "He helped me drag you over to the fireplace. You were cold as ice."

Bilbo sighed long and loud, his eyes fluttering as if he was finally coming back into his own body. "You've changed much, Thorin Oakenshield," he said, and finally looked Thorin in the eyes, "but you can be no one else."

There was an expectant look in Bilbo's eyes, a fortifying breath, and then a flash of hurt that made Thorin's heart ache. "All these *years* , Thorin, and you never thought to *tell* me?" His small fists clenched tightly, his knuckles going white. "I *mourned* you!"

Now it was time to speak. Thorin cursed his weak body for swooning and leaving his poor love thinking the very worst. "I know what it seems like, and I am sorry," Thorin replied

softly, noticing Bilbo startles at the sound of his voice again, regardless. “But believe me, I came here as soon as I could. I only awoke some months ago.”

A hardness that had been on Bilbo’s features faded away. “Some *months* ago?”

Thorin nodded. “About eight months. I was too weak to make my journey sooner.”

Bilbo’s wide eyes then dragged over Thorin’s body from head to toe, pausing on his scar again before he shook his head. “You came all the way from Erebor? From… oh goodness.” Bilbo’s eyes went impossibly wider with obvious concern. “You’re in no condition to be traveling so far, and alone? Are you alone?” The hobbit comically looked around as if expecting another twelve dwarves to burst into his home and blunt his knives.

“I am alone.”

Bilbo’s whole body went taught as he glared at Thorin. “I need some explanations.”

“Of course,” Thorin conceded. “May I have some water first?”

Bilbo's mouth opened and closed several times before his cheeks burned with embarrassment. "Of course," he said to Thorin. "You stay there. I'll make some tea and bring you something to eat."

“Please don’t trouble yourself–”

Apparently, at fifty-seven, Bilbo was still quite spry because he jumped up to his feet without even a grunt and waved a hand dismissively. “No trouble. It’ll do us both good,” he said with a trailed off mutter as he left the room.

Thorin's attention was drawn to the blanket that had been placed over him. He pulled it up to cover his bare and marred chest. It didn’t seem like a good idea to him to keep that vivid reminder of his death out in the open. He turned to face the fire, deep in thought about how he would explain everything that had happened. Sometime later, he must have drifted off to sleep, because the next thing he knew, Bilbo was approaching him with a tray of food and several drinks. Thorin gratefully accepted the meal, knowing that he had a long night ahead of him.

“I know I should probably let you rest and not press you for information, but, Thorin, you must understand…” Bilbo choked on his words and tried to suppress a sob. “Please tell me. Please explain.”

Thorin reached out to touch him, but Bilbo flinched back. The pain in Thorin’s heart was palpable, but he understood. “I will tell you everything. And will answer any of your questions. This is secret knowledge that I bestow upon you. It has been known to happen, though very rare, that a dwarf has passed on and put under the stone and that Mahal will bar entrance to his sacred halls and send that dwarf back. It is called Stone Sleep. Those who return are left to wander the rest of their lives, never really fitting in the lives they had before, never belonging to the living or the dead. It is a blessing, and a punishment for Mahal has given them a chance to redeem themselves in order to be worthy of joining their ancestors in

the sacred halls. But until true death comes to us, we linger and follow the pull of our hearts to fix and mend what was broken."

Thorin leaned up on his elbows, his gaze fixated on the fire. Bilbo's voice was soft as he said, "Your beard?"

Instinctively, his hand went to his own face, shocked again at finding it bare. Thorin sighed deeply. "Left behind with the rest of everything I once was. The life I lived before is no longer mine."

"Did your nephews…?" Bilbo asked with care.

Thorin shook his head. "No."

Bilbo pressed, "But could they?"

Thorin's heart ached at the thought. "I do not dare hope. This does not happen often, maybe once or twice per age." A sob tore through the air before it was muffled and Thorin whipped his head up to find Bilbo, covering his mouth and weeping. Thorin ached to reach out to his hobbit, but Bilbo was not his.

"Are you all right, Bilbo?"

His small hands went to his lap, and he shook his head. Bilbo's voice trembled as he replied, "No. I'm sorry. It's a lot."

Thorin understood. He knew Bilbo was trying to make sense of everything, to understand the foundations of the world you once knew crumbling beneath your feet. "I understand."

"I'm sorry." Bilbo's apology was barely audible in the space between them. He was purposefully keeping away from Thorin, and the fact pained him too much not to wince. Thorin lifted his head to meet Bilbo's gaze, and he saw the pain etched on the hobbit's face. "Please stop apologizing. It is I who must ask for forgiveness."

Bilbo grew visibly frustrated and stood abruptly, fists clenched at his sides. "We already had this conversation, and I don't care to repeat it!"

Thorin couldn't let it go. "Bilbo, upon waking, my first thought was of you."

Bilbo's gasp was violent as one of his fists flew to his heart. "What?"

Thorin took that as permission to continue. "Do not tell me there is nothing to mend between us. There should be no forgiveness for what I've done to you, for what I could've done and would have done in my madness. It was no excuse. I am a shamed dwarf. The only thing I could think about in my waking hours was to come here to get to you as soon as possible."

Bilbo stayed wide-eyed and quiet for a long moment before his cheeks flared. He cleared his throat. "You should eat. Please, Thorin. You're skin and bones. I have some cuts and cheeses and bread here. I'll burn the smial down if I try to cook anything in this state, but I promise

once I can wrap my head around some of this and be useful again, I'll cook you up a feast, I promise."

Something cold and ugly twisted in Thorin's chest at the hobbit's quick change in subject. Obviously, now was not the time to be so direct. Hobbits were not blunt creatures, after all. He tried to smile gratefully and hoped he succeeded. "I do not deserve your kindness."

Bilbo's voice was stern but laced with an exasperated fondness. "Shut up, you–confound you! No more apologies! Now eat!"

Thorin did as he was told, but frowned when Bilbo stood up again. "I thought you said it would do us both good to eat?" The hobbit hadn't touched a crumb of what he'd brought. Thorin pushed the tray towards Bilbo, but the hobbit shook his head.

"I need to get your room ready."

"That can surely wait until you've nourished yourself. Please." He had said that last word as gently as possible.

Bilbo scoffed and put his hands on his hips. His lip trembled for a moment before he smiled. "That pout looks even more ridiculous without your beard."

He didn't really know what kind of boldness filled him in that moment, but Thorin pushed out his lip even further and fluttered his lashes.

"Ha!" Bilbo exclaimed, and then clapped both hands over his mouth again as he shut his eyes hard. He took in a shaking breath through his nose and shook his head to dispel whatever emotion had overcome him in that moment. When he finally composed himself, Bilbo removed his hands and nodded. "You're right." He sat once more, a little closer to Thorin, who was pleased to discover it. "But let's just… eat. For now. I think that was too much information as it is for the circumstances."

"I agree," Thorin said with a wry smile that quickly fell. "I'm sorry for frightening you."

He heard Bilbo swallow as he ducked his head and picked up a roll to nibble on. "I thought I said no more apologies." Thorin was granted a brief smirk before Bilbo busied himself with eating.

The fire crackled softly in the hearth as Bilbo and Thorin finished their meal in silence, both lost in their own thoughts about the emotional day they experienced. Bilbo cleared the dishes and Thorin almost offered to wash them, but it seemed Bilbo had other plans. The dwarf was shooed out of the kitchen and made to follow him.

Bilbo led Thorin to the guest room, his steps slow and deliberate, as if he wanted to savor every moment they had until having to separate for the evening. Thorin knew it was wishful thinking. The room was cozy, with a large bed and a small unlit fireplace. "You're exhausted," he muttered as he lit the candles. "So, I think you should leave the washing up for tomorrow."

Thorin nodded in acknowledgement. “Very well.” He watched the hobbit prepare the bedding and light the fireplace.

And then there was nothing left for Bilbo to do. The hobbit shuffled his feet, clapped his hands together and hummed, avoiding Thorin’s gaze. They stood there for a moment, unsure of what to do next. Finally, Bilbo spoke up with forced cheer. "Well then, good night, Thorin. Sleep well." And just like that, Bilbo left the room and closed the door behind him.

But no footsteps led away from his door.

Thorin closed his eyes and prayed, but before his prayer could be fully formed, existing only in a pool of pure want, the door burst open again. His eyes snapped open to behold his One, red faced, teary eyes and a look of pure devastation on his lovely face.

“...Thorin…” It was more like a breath than a spoken name.

Silently, Thorin opened his arms. Bilbo sobbed again as he lunged into Thorin’s arms. The dwarf embraced his One, squeezing tight. He felt Bilbo’s wet cheek on his scar–he’d forgotten his tunic was torn open. The sounds wrenching themselves from his poor hobbit were enough to make him almost swoon again. So, he walked them back until his knees hit the bed and Thorin pulled Bilbo onto his lap.

“Oh, Thorin,” the hobbit rasped into the crook of his neck. And suddenly Thorin was happy he had no beard to keep him from feeling those blessed lips on his scorching skin.

“It’s alright,” he cooed and murmured into Bilbo’s ear so he could be heard over Bilbo’s weeping. “I’m here now. I will not leave you. I am here.” He rocked his One in his arms as he once did his nephews and began to cry as well. “I am here.”

Somehow, Bilbo fell asleep and Thorin carefully tucked him into his bed. There was plenty of space, after all, and he didn’t know where Bilbo’s room was. He didn’t think he had the strength to carry the hobbit to his own bed, anyway. So, he decided the most logical thing to do was to share a bed. Bilbo would understand. Thorin crept onto the bed and under the covers, feeling only a little brutish for reaching out to his hobbit. But his guilt vanished when Bilbo responded immediately and snuggled into his arms with a sniffle.

Thorin couldn’t help but sigh with contentment when he felt Bilbo’s warm, soft body press against his. His One felt so small in his arms. So right. One of Thorin’s last thoughts before succumbing to sleep was how incredibly in love he was with the treasure in his arms.

Tomorrow could be a disaster.

But tomorrow could wait.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like I was a little lazy with my descriptions but I'm closing this off here. I do have more ideas for this universe so make sure to subscribe because it will be a series.

I hope you enjoyed this short fic. Smut in the series to come!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!