Fix What is Broken

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by mordelle

Summary

"They don't understand me, and I barely understand them. It's like we're speaking different languages. And again," Bilbo said with a warning tone, “that is not your fault.”

It was unacceptable. It was at the very least partly Thorin's fault that his friend was now ostracized. But he knew he would not win that battle, so he smartly changed the subject with an offer. "Well, then," Thorin said, a small smile playing on his lips. "I suppose we'll just have to teach them our language, won't we?"

Notes

I think I finally have a plan to end on another hopeful note, at least for a bit!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Thorin had never thought he'd find himself back in Bag End. The idea of it had seemed impossible after he had fallen in the Battle of the Five Armies. But somehow, he had been given a second chance at life, and with it, the chance to return to the home of his One he had once thought he would never see again. Everything was so familiar, and yet all was different. The walls seemed to hold memories of his past life, memories of a time before he had faced death and come out on the other side, but not enough to weigh him down too much… somehow. There were other matters that were more important now.

It was strange, being back in the hobbit hole that he had once left with such an optimistic heart. Or at least as optimistic as Thorin could have been, knowing there could be a dragon still swimming in the treasury. But enough of the past. The dragon was dead, and the evil whispers of the gold left behind, thank Mahal.

Despite the strangeness, there was also a sense of comfort in being in Bilbo's *smial*- as he called it. It was a place where he knew he had nowhere else he had to be, no battles to fight, no enemies to defeat. He could simply be. Still a novel idea, no matter how much time passed.

Bilbo, his dear friend and love of his life, had welcomed him, but Thorin could sense the unease that lay just beneath the surface. He knew that his resurrection was a lot for Bilbo to process, that it brought up old wounds that he had thought had healed. At least, he assumed that was what was keeping Bilbo so… distant. But even with this knowledge, Thorin couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude. He was grateful to be in Bag End, to be with Bilbo at all, to have a place to call home, if only until the poor hobbit tired of him.

At first, he spent his days exploring the hobbit hole, taking in the little details that he had missed the first time around. He found himself drawn to the garden, of all things, marveling at the way the flowers bloomed and the vegetables thrived. He wondered if Bilbo would mind him adding some stone paths here and there. There was room for a little rock garden that Thorin thought would look quaint enough for Bilbo's taste. He filed that thought away for later scrutiny.

In the evenings, he would sit with Bilbo, talking about anything and everything, sharing stories of their past adventures and the new experiences that they'd had since they had last seen each other. Nothing too deep. Nothing that touched on any pain, no matter how those plagued him later, before sleep could claim him properly. There was a sense of peace in those moments, a sense that everything was right in the world, at least for a little while. It was a feeling that Thorin had only experienced before with his family… his… his nephews and sister–a feeling of contentment and belonging that he had thought was lost to him forever.

But even with this newfound sense of peace, there was also a sense of unease that lingered in the back of his mind. He knew that his second chance at life was a gift, and every moment he didn't tell Bilbo how he truly felt was like squandering that second chance. He knew his

purpose, even before his eyes had fluttered open in that tomb. But Thorin feared Bilbo's reaction.

The former king had to remind himself that for Bilbo, almost eight years had passed. For Thorin, it felt like a scant few months. And even if Thorin had noticed Bilbo's lingering looks over campfires on their journey, the lingering looks he received now were nothing like those. There used to be fondness, sometimes exasperation, sometimes… maybe lust. Now, Bilbo's gaze lingered as if Thorin might vanish or drop dead at any moment. It was frustrating, but he was content to *simply be* in Bag End, to take in the sights and sounds of the world around him, and to cherish the moments he had with his One. He could be patient. He would let Bilbo see that he was *there,* and had no plans of going anywhere without his hobbit nearby.

As the days passed, Thorin became restless. He wasn't used to having so much free time on his hands, and he didn't want to crowd Bilbo, who was still coming to terms with everything. So he fixed little things around the smial. A loose floorboard here, a squeaky hinge there. It was a way to pass the time, to keep himself occupied while Bilbo went about his daily routine. It was also his way of thanking his host–maybe even redeeming himself.

But one day, Bilbo noticed him working and nearly had a fit.

"I'd be a terrible host if I let you *work* in my home like some sort of hired help! No, no, no. Thorin, you are welcome here as my esteemed *guest* . You don't need to do a single thing, and if you have some silly notion about repaying me for my kindness, I beg you to rid it from your mind this instant."

Thorin pursed his lips to keep from smiling, lest Bilbo think he was making fun of him. He couldn't help himself. "I'm sorry to distress your hobbit sensibilities, Master Baggins." But then he couldn't help his chuckle when Bilbo put his fists on his hips and huffed with indignation at the formality. Bilbo almost retorted, but Thorin continued. "But truly, Bilbo, I miss working with my hands. I'm a master smith, you know. It's been… cathartic to repair things here in your smial."

Bilbo visibly deflated instantly, and his gaze grew soft and fond. "Oh, of course. I… should have thought of that." He let out a short, bitter laugh. "You must be bored out of your mind here with only me for company."

Nope. Absolutely not , thought Thorin. He stood, imposing and looming. "I am actually quite content here with you, Bilbo."

The hobbit made a face that said he obviously didn't believe Thorin's words, and he ducked his head to keep from meeting Thorin's gaze. So, Thorin put down his tools and reached out his hand, slowly, until he knew Bilbo wouldn't flinch away. And thank Mahal, he didn't. But when Thorin's hand finally landed on his shoulder, Bilbo was rigid beneath his touch. It was understandable. Thorin had made very little effort to touch his One, to give him time to get used to his presence. Now he hoped that casual touch would be accepted, and it seemed that Bilbo appreciated it, even if he was clearly not used to it.

The tightness in his eyes and lips, the shortened breaths, and raised shoulders all pointed to Bilbo's discomfort. Still, his brave hobbit did not make a move to step away. So, Thorin squeezed Bilbo's shoulder gently until he finally looked up to meet his gaze.

The hobbit swallowed visibly and shifted nervously on his feet, eyes wide with a mixture of hope and trepidation. But there was nothing to fear, and Thorin was set on convincing him.

"I would never lie to you, Bilbo," he murmured earnestly. And Bilbo's mouth fell open with a small gasp, his eyes dilated as they grew wider, which seemed like a good sign. "There is nowhere I'd rather be, my friend. I would not be here otherwise."

The heaviness of the moment was keenly felt by both, and Thorin stepped closer. "Why are you here, Thorin?" Bilbo whispered.

This was his chance. This was the moment to confess all. But he did not. Not all. "To fix this plumbing, of course. Last I heard, it was not up to snuff to withstand the bowels of dwarrow." He winked for good measure.

Bilbo actually snorted, which seemed to surprise him. And then, the most beautiful thing Thorin had ever heard rang through the air… Bilbo's laugh. A true, long, merry laugh–the first for Thorin in this new life. And he laughed too.

And as the days turned into weeks, Thorin found that he was beginning to feel more at home in Bag End. The little things that he had fixed seemed to hold a special significance, a reminder of the time he had spent with Bilbo. Proof that he was there, physically taking up space, no matter how many times Bilbo snuck glances at him. There wasn't much else to do after a while, and Thorin wished he had a forge. His idle hands twitched to reach out for his One as much as possible and it got increasingly difficult to curb his impulse.

Make no mistake, he took every opportunity to touch Bilbo. Sometimes it was a graze of shoulders. Whenever Bilbo handed him something, he made sure to slide a finger over his, or even clasp his hand at any chance available. Whether reaching for the same item at once, passing something along, teaching Bilbo how to use a tool, being taught by Bilbo how to play conkers, learning to plant vegetables and herbs, or building the garden's new stone paths side by side.

Sometimes, it seemed Bilbo relished in it as much as Thorin did. But he didn't know whether it was because Bilbo wanted his touch in particular, or just to be touched at all. For it appeared that the hobbit rarely left his home, except to tend to his garden. And there were no visitors to be had. It was a stark contrast to the bustling Bag End that Thorin remembered from his previous life, but then again, there had been thirteen dwarves and a wizard present.

One day, he decided to ask Bilbo about it, and the hobbit paled in an instant. "Oh, um, no. Not many come by here very often anymore."

Thorin raised a brow, clearly interested in knowing more. Bilbo appeared highly uncomfortable with the topic, and although Thorin didn't want to cause him any upset, he felt this was important to know. "You imply you used to receive visitors, then?"

"Oh, yes." Bilbo chuckled and sighed. "Especially when my parents were still around." He smiled wistfully, then ducked his head. "I was already considered a bit… queer. You know, odd. Because I preferred my books to most things. And…" he eyed Thorin carefully before he continued, " *other*... reasons. After my coming of age, I was labeled as, erm, a Confirmed Bachelor. So, *obviously* , that meant no ladies would be pushed through my doors for tea. And then… well, then I went on an adventure," he grinned, but there was something off about it. "'that was the last weed the gardener pulled,' as they say. They call me Mad Baggins behind my back." He chuckled. "At last, I am much too scandalous to be associated with, now that you're here… staying in my smial."

"I'm glad you find it amusing," Thorin deadpanned. "But I can tell it bothers you, Bilbo. And it *hurts* me to know that *I* am the cause of your isolation!"

"Please don't blame yourself *,"* Bilbo begged, leaning forward in his favorite armchair. "Most of the time, Lobelia is the one to knock on my door, and believe me," Bilbo looked at him with genuine gratitude, "She does not come here to exchange pleasantries–quite the opposite. I am glad not to hear that nasally, weasel–nosed nuisance! Hateful turnip, that she is." Bilbo shook his head and waved his hand dismissively. "My neighbor is just respecting my space. He's no doubt burning with good natured curiosity and bouncing on his heels waiting for me to invite him for tea." He smiled ruefully as he stared at his window, as if expecting his neighbor to be peeking through his curtains.

"Still," Thorin called his attention back with a mournful glower. "Had it not been for me, you would not have–"

"Had the best adventure a Baggins, or a Took could have ever asked for," Bilbo finished with no sign of regret–far from it. The hobbit looked proud, straightened in his chair, shoulder back and chin held high. A thought seemed to cross the hobbits mind, then. Bilbo hesitated for a moment before finally speaking. "I don't really blame them, the other hobbits People around here... they don't really know what to make of me anymore. I'd been gone for so long, and I came back… changed. They don't understand me, and I barely understand them. It's like we're speaking different languages. And again," Bilbo said with a warning tone, "that is not your fault."

It was unacceptable. It was at the very least partly Thorin's fault that his friend was now ostracized. But he knew he would not win that battle, so he smartly changed the subject with an offer. "Well, then," Thorin said, a small smile playing on his lips. "I suppose we'll just have to teach them our language, won't we?"

Bilbo looked at him, surprise written on his face, before a small smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. "I suppose we can try, Thorin," he said, his voice laced with amusement. "Though I haven't the slightest clue on how to start. As you know, hobbits around here are very wary of change and strangers."

Thorin smirked. "I might have an idea."

That is how Thorin came to meet the Gamgees. With Bilbo's neighbor's help, they were able to spread the word that a Master Smith had come to town in search of work. Master Baggins, having experience with dwarves before, graciously offered his hospitality in exchange for fixing up his smial and turning his garden into the next monthly contest winner.

Little by little, curiosity won out among the normally skittish hobbits when Bilbo actually did win Best Garden of the Month twice in a row. Word spread quickly, and even Bilbo's Took and Brandybuck cousins from across the farthings began to call on Bilbo and the famous dwarf, Mister Smith.

After light conversation, and lots of tea, finger sandwiches and pastries, Thorin would offer his services as a smith and handy-dwarf. The hobbits would jump on the opportunity every single time. Sometimes he charged just for the materials and leasing the forge in Bree, but he'd always leave with a basket full to the brim with Bilbo's favorite foods, and greetings, thanks, and well-wishes for Master Bilbo.

The plan had worked wonders. They would get stopped in the markets to chit chat, hobbits would smile and nod in greeting as they passed them, and fauntlings started appearing in the smial and Bilbo's garden.

Not everyone had been won over, however.

Thorin had been literally tackled to the floor by Bilbo one afternoon while he went to answer the door after hearing a loud, incessant knocking.

"Don't!" Bilbo hissed at the same time they tumbled onto the ground. The hobbit didn't seem to notice the extreme close proximity the fall had led to. Bilbo ended up straddled over Thorin, both arms bracketing his head, basically trapping Thorin beneath him. The dwarf stared up at Bilbo, breath held, watching as the hobbit's ears twitched every time the person outside made a sound. It was all muffled through the door, but Thorin could clearly hear it was a female voice muttering insults and threats. He felt a bit of shame that he did not care... because Bilbo's warm weight and soft scent was enough to make Thorin's longing and desire blaze like the Sacred Forges of Mahal.

At last, Bilbo looked down, only to freeze in mortified shock.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Bilbo's discomfiture only intensified, and he coughed nervously before confessing, "Lobelia believes that we are...together." He stumbled over the word, his face suffusing with a deep shade of crimson. "In a romantic sense, that is."

Bilbo's countenance suddenly transformed, the rosy hue of embarrassment suffusing his cheeks and radiating off him in waves of heat. Thorin was taken aback by the sudden shift in Bilbo's demeanor and couldn't help but feel concerned for his well-being, as the silence stretched on.

The fiery arousal that had ignited within him was swiftly quenched by the very real possibility of Bilbo fainting before him. "Bilbo? Are you quite alright?" Thorin inquired, his hand instinctively reaching out to feel the heated flush of Bilbo's skin.

To their credit, neither of them recoiled from the contact. Bilbo stumbled over his words, struggling to find his voice amidst the sudden rush of emotions. After several false starts, he managed to stammer out, "I-I beg your pardon, Thorin. I never intended to...um...land on you in such a fashion," his voice was barely above a whisper.

Thorin could discern the unmistakable signs of mortification etched all over Bilbo's countenance. It was discouraging to note that Bilbo was not reveling in the closest approximation of an embrace since his first evening there. Thorin craved that proximity, the physicality, and the intimacy that came with sleeping in each other's arms. Exhaustion had denied him that pleasure before, and a repetition of that sleeping arrangement had yet to transpire. Perhaps that would change soon, Thorin mused with hope.

With a soft chuckle and a winning smile, Thorin attempted to dissipate the tension that lingered between them. "I must say, Bilbo, I'm thoroughly impressed that you were able to bring down a seasoned warrior with such ease."

The flush that had suffused his cheeks earlier had yet to abate. Thorin couldn't help but be amused by Bilbo's adorable shyness. Of all people to be rendered speechless! Leaning in closer, Thorin sought to prolong the intimate moment, relishing the sensation of Bilbo's fiery cheek beneath the caress of his knuckles.

To Thorin's amazement, Bilbo's blush grew even deeper, and his eyes took on a glazed, faraway look. An endearing frown graced his visage, as if he were striving to comprehend what was occurring. The dwarf chuckled once more, a warmth suffusing his chest that he struggled to explain even to himself. Thorin had never experienced this sort of sensation

before, this inexplicable feeling of his heart leaping within his chest. The physical touch that they shared made him feel as though he had finally arrived home.

As they lay in a tense and uneasy silence, Thorin contemplated the possibility of sharing his true feelings with Bilbo. Drawing a deep breath and summoning his courage, he turned his face up to the hobbit and spoke in a voice that was grave and measured. "Bilbo," he began. "There's something that I need to tell you." With resolve gleaming in his eyes, Thorin prepared to take the plunge.

As if on cue, the tranquility of their intimate moment was disrupted by a sudden uproar outside. Lobelia, Bilbo's venomous cousin, had arrived and was now standing outside the window, spewing venom at the two of them. "I knew it! I knew you had lost all your propriety!" she screamed, her face contorted with anger and disgust.

As Lobelia's words pierced through walls and glass, Bilbo visibly panicked and quickly got off of Thorin, faster than if he had been scalded by a frying pan. He stumbled backwards, looking mortified and unsure of what to do next. He frantically looked from Thorin to the door. Thorin, on the other hand, was determined to protect Bilbo from any harm, physical or otherwise, and immediately rose to his feet to confront his raging relative, but at seeing him approach, Lobelia screamed as if he were about to murder her in cold blood and ran off.

Bilbo, meanwhile, was in a state of shock, his face drained of all color. He looked at Thorin, his eyes pleading as he quickly scrambled to his feet. "Thorin, stay inside, I'll take care of this."

Thorin was torn between wanting to rush outside and help Bilbo and staying put, hoping that the hobbit could handle the situation on his own–whatever the situation was, since he still had not a clue. Something was clearly very wrong, and he couldn’t help feeling like it was somehow his doing. He watched with a heavy heart as Bilbo's footsteps echoed against the ground, the sound of his departure like the pounding of a drum in his ears.

As he peered out the window, Thorin could see the two figures in the distance, their voices carrying on the wind. Lobelia's shrill tones were unmistakable, spitting venom and malice with every word. Bilbo, on the other hand, sounded desperate and pleading, his voice strained with emotion.

Thorin tried to catch their exact words, but the cacophony was too overwhelming, a jumbled mess of accusations and insults. It was clear that Lobelia was determined to make trouble, to cause a scene no matter the cost.

“It’s a misunderstanding!”

“... I knew you didn’t deserve that smial!”

“We fell! ... Please….!”

“You just wait until…!”

“Would you quiet down!”

Then, all of a sudden, the voices faded, their anger and frustration simmering down to a tense, bitter muttering. Thorin watched as Bilbo gestured wildly, trying to explain himself, his words falling on deaf ears. Lobelia seemed unmoved by his pleas, her face twisted in disgust and disdain. But Bilbo was not one to give up so easily. Thorin could see the fire in his eyes, the fierce determination that burned bright within him. He watched as the hobbit dug in his heels, standing his ground against his cousin's tirade.

With bated breath, Thorin observed as Lobelia's hands rested firmly on her hips, poised to leave, but Bilbo caught her by the sleeve and the heated exchange continued. As the argument persisted, Bilbo's countenance became increasingly crestfallen and he lowered his head in despair, his fingers furiously rubbing his face in frustration. The dwarf could sense the tension in the hobbit's body, as if his muscles were coiled like a tightly wound spring. But then, as if by some unseen force, Bilbo suddenly straightened, his head held high, and pointed an accusatory finger at Lobelia.

Despite her obstinate demeanor, Bilbo's bravado seemed to shake her resolve. With one last glance, Bilbo turned on his heel and made his way back inside. Thorin could see the weight of the altercation upon the hobbit's shoulders, his posture now hunched with a tinge of regret and fear. Closing the door behind him, Bilbo sighed long and hard.

Thorin parted his lips to speak, eager to grasp the full extent of the situation, but Bilbo intercepted him with an imploring hand gesture. "My dear Thorin," he began, his tone wrought with remorse, "I am dreadfully sorry that this happened. I implored her to see reason, but my efforts were… futile."

Thorin's heart sank, watching as the worry etched itself more prominently on Bilbo's countenance. He resolved to approach the matter delicately, not wishing to exacerbate his One’s distress. "See reason?" he asked, a gentle inflection lacing his words.

Bilbo's lips twitched weakly, a sad smile ghosting across his face, as he struggled to voice his predicament. Thorin could sense the hobbit's upset, and his concern grew in tandem. "I thought this would happen someday," Bilbo began haltingly, his fingers twitching fretfully, "and I am mortified for not warning you in advance."

What could have given rise to such conflict? Bilbo's discomfiture only intensified, and he coughed nervously before confessing, "Lobelia believes that we are...together." He stumbled over the word, his face suffusing with a deep shade of crimson. "In a romantic sense, that is."

For a moment, Thorin was at a loss for words, unsure of how to respond to the situation at hand. He longed to express his feelings to Bilbo, to reassure him that his affections were pure and true, but he sensed that the hobbit was not ready to hear it. This was exactly what he wanted, to be a proper couple as One’s usually became, but Bilbo seemed so afraid of the notion. So Thorin stayed silent and waited for Bilbo to continue his point. Because why would the thought of being romantically involved set Bilbo’s cousin off like that? Was it because they were not married by Hobbit standards?

The silence was broken by the hobbit's sudden exclamation, "I should make tea!" and he dashed off to the kitchen. *Perhaps* , thought Thorin ruefully, *I should have said something.*

Thorin followed cautiously, his mind a whirlwind of questions and concerns.

When he arrived in the kitchen, he found Bilbo frantically searching through cupboards and drawers, the clanging of pots and pans filling the air. Despite his own fears and doubts, Thorin could not help but be touched by the hobbit's frantic actions. It was clear that Bilbo was trying to distract himself from the difficult conversation they were having. Thorin stepped forward, his heart heavy with emotion, and placed a reassuring hand on Bilbo's shoulder.

Thorin's heart ached with a sharp pain as he watched Bilbo jump at his touch, clearly taken aback by his sudden presence. The very sight of his One's startled expression was enough to cause Thorin to flinch back, feeling like a hammer had struck him in the gut. It pained him to the core to know that even in a small way, his One had rejected him. Despite the agony, he managed to maintain his composure, hiding his emotions as Bilbo turned to face him, his eyes wide with fear.

Thorin stepped back, attempting to distance himself from the hobbit, though every fiber of his being cried out for him to stay close. He could never bear to see such a look of terror on Bilbo's face again, let alone be the cause of it. The hobbit must have sensed something was amiss, for the fear in his expression was quickly replaced with guilt as he spoke in a low whisper. "I'm fine," Bilbo said, his voice barely audible. "I just… I never meant for things to get so complicated. I'm sorry."

Thorin knew he had to tread carefully, to handle the hobbit's emotions with the utmost care. He didn't have all the answers, but he was determined to find a way to make things right between them. This was a moment that could not be squandered, and he would proceed with the utmost gentleness.

As Bilbo sat across from him, the air between them was thick with tension. The hobbit wrung his hands and twisted his teacup as though he was trying to wring out every ounce of fear he had left. After several minutes of silence that seemed to drag on for an eternity, Bilbo finally spoke, his voice trembling with emotion.

"Thorin, I need to ask," he began, his voice breathy and timid. "I've mentioned this before but… I'm what they call a Confirmed Bachelor. Do you know what that is?"

"That you are unattached… romantically?"

Bilbo nodded. "Yes, but… but the reason for that is because I don't... I don't like-the-ladies," he rushed at the end. "Not that I don't like them," Bilbo continued nervously, probably misinterpreting Thorin's silence again, the hobbit's face growing redder by the second. "I like them just fine. What I mean to say is that I do not like the idea of a romantic relationship with any lady. Which, of course, means to say... that means to say... that is, I prefer the... males, in that regard, romantically, I mean."

Again, Thorin waited patiently for more. Bilbo shook himself, eyes filling with unshed tears and not able to look Thorin in the eye. Bilbo's face was a picture of distress, as though he expected Thorin to recoil in horror or disdain. But instead, Thorin simply nodded, silently encouraging Bilbo to continue. Thorin's expectant gaze lingered on Bilbo, hoping for more to

be said. But the hobbit had lapsed into a state of self-consciousness, with a nervous twitch of his nose and a wary look in his eye. He was clearly feeling exposed and vulnerable, and Thorin wanted to do everything in his power to make him feel at ease. He could restrain himself no more. Thorin reached out and took Bilbo's hand in his own, the only gesture of comfort he thought might finally be accepted–and thank Mahal, it was.

"I should have told you sooner," Bilbo finally murmured, his voice trembling with regret. "I was afraid that you would look at me differently, or that it would change things between us."

"Thank you for telling me, Bilbo," Thorin said, his voice low and measured.

"But?" Bilbo prompted gently. His One seemed to be bracing himself for something, and it made Thorin's heart skip a beat.

And why did it look like Bilbo was awaiting a death sentence when he voiced that simple question that Thorin had no intention of asking? *Oh*...

His hand instinctively went to his sword, only to find that it wasn't there. It had been months since he had been without a weapon, but in that moment, he wished he had it with him. The thought of danger, of something threatening Bilbo's safety, filled him with dread.

"Are we in danger?" he asked, his voice low and urgent. He needed to know the truth, no matter how grim it may be. "Is there a death penalty for such relationships, like in some of the cities of men in the East?"

Thorin's mind was racing with possibilities, each more terrifying than the last. He looked at Bilbo, hoping for reassurance, but the hobbit's expression only added to his growing sense of unease.

"What?!" Bilbo squawked, eyes wide with shock and brow disappearing under his curls. "No! No-no-no! Oh, dear, nothing like that–"

"Imprisonment then?"

Bilbo sighed long and hard. "No, no, nothing like that. The consequences are not that dire. Goodness me."

Thorin stared at him, still confused. "Then what are the consequences?"

Bilbo hesitated, "Well, we might not receive as many visitors as we used to. Other hobbits might stop inviting us over to things. All the hard work you've put into… into… making friends. Well, it might have all been in vain. You see, as long as you were my guest, and you had plans to-to to *leave*.. ." Bilbo's face paled abruptly, but his speech quickened the longer he spoke. "That we were just friends– *are* ! *Are* just *friends* ! Then, then, there would have maybe been some gossip but no proof. They'd have turned a blind eye so to speak. But-but," he laughed mirthlessly, "but Lobelia saw us… um… and misunderstood the situation. She said… oh, Yavannah, I can't believe I'm even going to relay this, but she said that she'd keep 'our secret' if you did free work for her whenever she needed it–"

“I will do whatever it takes to keep that harpy's mouth shut to save your reputation–”

“No! No, please! Not for my sake!” Bilbo cried out and leaned forward, burying his face in his hands and then resurfacing with pleading eyes. “This is a mess!”

But Thorin stood and paced back and forth in the kitchen, his mind churning with all the information and implications. There was so much to untangle in his mind and he couldn’t figure out which string to pull first. "I wanted to help you regain your old friendships for your sake, not my own. This is *my* fault. I caused this." he said, his voice tinged with utter regret. “This is the real reason why you had no visitors when I came to you? Because they all believed us to be romantically involved?”

After a heavy, suffering sigh Bilbo looked at him with pity, "Thorin, it's not your fault. It's just the way things are. And like I said, they… already *knew* about, well, me. I’ve been a confirmed bachelor since I came of age. It’s a polite way of saying… that I’m… that I’m… unnatural, but–”

It was like Thorin’s veins had been filled with molten ore, his sudden wrath even made Bilbo blink up at him with fear. “Pardon?” He asked, too quietly to sound anything but menacing. Bilbo, his brave and kind hobbit, had been made to believe he was… “Unnatural? What nonsense.”

Bilbo looked at him with a mixture of confusion and fear. "Nonsense? Is this something dwarrows would not find scandalous?"

"Scandalous?!" Thorin exclaimed, incredulous and insulted on behalf of his race. "It is the norm! And it is perfectly natural. We have a very low population of dwarrowdams. It is rare to find a One in a dam. And some females find a One in another female."

Bilbo's eyes widened in surprise. "I... I didn't know."

Thorin stepped closer again, his expression softening. "It is not something we discuss often only because we have no need to. It is not looked down upon at all. You have nothing to be ashamed of, Bilbo."

Bilbo nodded, still looking uncertain. "Thank you, Thorin. I just... I didn't want you to think..."

But Bilbo’s confused face moved Thorin to kneel before him, his abrupt rage lost because the need to comfort his One was too strong for anything else. "Bilbo, listen to me. You are *not* unnatural.” He repeated, firm but gentle. “You may be unique, one of a kind, but you have never been *anything* less than an *exceptional* hobbit, companion, and a true friend."

Bilbo looked up at Thorin with wide eyes, as if not quite believing what he’d heard. "Is it really common? Among dwarves?"

It seemed Bilbo was having just as difficult a time as Thorin was in choosing what parts of their conversation to focus on, as if he were too overwhelmed with the news that Thorin had just given him, and Thorin understood. He understood that ingrained beliefs were hard to

change and even harder to break free from completely. It would take time for Bilbo to wrap his head around it all.

So Thorin followed Bilbo's lead, hoping that he could find a way to come to terms with everything as quickly as possible. Because if Bilbo had thought Thorin was unavailable because of some *ridiculous* notion that Thorin would be disgusted with such a union, then Thorin had to wait for Bilbo to come to such a conclusion himself. If he spoke his feelings too freely too soon, it might ruin everything.

What a silly thing to keep them apart for so long! *Well, it wasn't just that, was it,* he thought. *The journey left no time for wooing and courting. All that was supposed to come* after . *But then I died. Preferring to leave him unburdened with such a confession.* But it was clear that Bilbo was anything but unburdened. He looked so small and confused when he asked again, "Is it really the norm?"

With a racing heart, Thorin nodded, a small and patient smile playing on his lips. "Yes." And he repeated it just in case. "Two males in a romantic relationship is the norm." And then, Bilbo seemed to deflate with relief and something else entirely too raw for Thorin to decipher, and Thorin squeezed his shoulder gently, trying to pour every ounce of his love and reassurance into the contact. "You have nothing to be ashamed of, Bilbo. You are who you are, and that is perfectly fine."

His One looked up, eyes shining before silent tears freely fell onto his cheeks. "Thank you, Thorin," he whispered, before suddenly throwing his arms around the dwarf's neck and pulling him into a tight and desperate hold.

Thorin was taken aback for only a moment, but then he quickly returned the embrace, holding Bilbo's small frame close. Thorin was still on one knee, so Bilbo was a bit taller, which also gave Thorin the opportunity to bury his face into the crook of Bilbo's neck. He was tempted to leave a kiss on that soft patch of skin, tempted to taste that sensitive area and see how Bilbo would react. But he did no such thing, instead resting his chapped lips against the spot and hoping that Bilbo felt the same heat that coursed through him from the contact.

The hobbit did gasp, but there was no way to know whether it had been from that delicate touch, or the emotional tumult he was enduring.

Thorin had no idea how long they had held each other, but eventually they pulled back slowly, reluctantly. And Thorin saw the worry and uncertainty in Bilbo's eyes had been replaced with something else. Something like hope and fear all mixed into one. Thorin took a deep, cleansing breath, his broad shoulders easing down from their previously tense position. It was as though a boulder had been lifted from his chest, allowing him to breathe a little easier. He gazed at Bilbo with an intense, unwavering expression, determined to make his point.

"We'll just have to make sure that we continue to be good neighbors and friends," Thorin declared, his voice calm but resolute. He had never been one to shy away from a challenge, and this was no exception. "We won't let this change anything."

Bilbo's eyes widened, his lips parting in surprise. "What?"

Thorin leaned forward, his gaze fixed on Bilbo's. "Even if they do think we are a couple, what does it matter? I don't care what they say or think. It changes nothing. We shall continue as we are, keep inviting your friends and kin. Those who come, are true companions. Those who shun us, may they rot in orc filth for all I care. As long as you do not feel ashamed, I am content with the harpy going off to wag her tongue like the rabid warg she is."

Bilbo's mouth fell open, completely stunned by Thorin's declaration. "You...you don't mind being seen as...as one of *those* kinds of couples?" he stammered.

Thorin let out a soft chuckle, reaching across the table to take Bilbo's hand. "Bilbo, I don't care about the rumors or the gossip. What matters to me is you. Does it bother you?"

A look of wonder crept over Bilbo's face, his eyes glistening and dazed. "No," he breathed out in a short gasp.

The corner of Thorin's lips quirked up in a small smile. "Now, why don't we finish our tea before it gets cold?" he suggested, pulling his hand back to reach for his cup.

There. He had planted the seed, and now it was time for it to grow on its own. Of course, he knew a lot more about growing things from Bilbo's tutelage now, and what all growing things needed was just a little encouragement through watering and the right amount of sunlight. Thorin pondered on what kind of encouragement would be right for Bilbo.

Before he could think of anything, Bilbo cleared his throat and slapped the table lightly. "Well, then. Yes. Um… this has been quite a tumultuous afternoon, I must say."

"Agreed," Thorin muttered.

Bilbo giggled nervously and swallowed hard. His hand came up, absentmindedly rubbing at his neck where Thorin distinctly remembers resting his lips upon a few moments ago. "I think I need a kip. Or a smoke. Or… something. Not to be rude, or anything, but I'll just excuse myself for now. I have… to think."

Pursing his lips to stifle a grin, Thorin nodded slowly. "I understand. It's a lot to process all at once. I am not offended. Take all the time you need." *Yes,* he thought, *think on it. And maybe you will find the courage I have yet to harness.*

With a polite smile and some mumbled words of gratitude, Bilbo stood, walked to his study and shut himself inside.

Think on it. He prayed again. *Think of us. Think of how it could be.*

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thorin reclined by the hearth, the mesmerizing flames captivating his gaze. The crackling fire imbued the air with warmth and cast soft, dancing shadows in the room. Anyone would have have felt nothing but tranquility. But Not Thorin.

There was nothing tranquil behind Thorin’s breast bone.

His heart would not calm.

Lost within the pages of his chosen tome, Thorin attempted to immerse himself in the written words before him. Yet, the words remained elusive, slipping through cracks in his thoughts like sand in a fist. His mind yearned for clarity, craving a respite from the ceaseless pacing and mutterings that emanated from Bilbo's secluded study.

What is happening inside that clever mind right now?

Thorin's heartbeat quickened as anticipation mounted. He yearned for Bilbo's presence, aching to unravel the storm that brewed within the hobbit's study. The dwarrow culture lesson had obviously taken a toll on the hobbit, much more than Thorin initially anticipated. The passage of time was slow, each second stretching out with a grueling pace, as Thorin's gaze remained fixed upon the study door, awaiting his hobbit.

At last, the door groaned under the gentle push, and Bilbo emerged, disarrayed and disheveled, as if the secrets of the study had unraveled him. The absence of his waistcoat, the slightly askew brace, and the ruffled state of his hair bore witness to a restless day spent lost in anxious contemplation. His weary eyes bore the telltale signs of a soul wrestling with untamed thoughts he had probably never allowed himself to imagine, while a trace of brandy lingered in the air around him.

Thorin's breath hitched at the sight of Bilbo's disheveled form, a complex blend of concern and arousal coursing through his veins. He yearned to reach out and give any support that would ease the hobbit's burdened heart. Whisper sweet nothings into those pointy ears that teased Thorin’s thoughts about whether or not they were as sensitive as they looked. This was not the time for such musings. In any case, he wanted to comfort his One. But words faltered in his mouth, leaving him in a fragile state of silence.

As usual, he thought best to wait it out, wait for Bilbo to make the first move.

In that charged moment, Thorin's gaze locked with Bilbo's, an unspoken yearning for understanding and connection shimmering between them. The weight of unsaid words hung in the air, palpable and pregnant with significance.

“Hullo,” Bilbo piped with a forced, cheery smile and an awkward little wave.

Thorin gave him a slow nod as he tried to gauge how drunk his hobbit was. “Good evening, Bilbo.”

Bilbo started, swinging his head left, then right. “Evening?! Oh, my goodness. Dinner! I didn’t cook any dinner!”

“Peace, Bilbo,” Thorin chuckled, “I had the foresight to cook a stew. I hope you don’t mind.”

Bilbo looked mortified as he clasped and unclasped his hands, and shuffled his feet. “My mother is rolling in her grave right now,” he muttered and then sniffed. “The damage is done, I guess.” He shrugged helplessly and gave Thorin a tentative smile. “I just came out here to ask you a question…”

Thorin waited, raising his eyebrows expectantly. “Yes?”

A small, nervous giggle escaped the hobbit. “Um, well, I’m having quite a time wondering about dwarven culture all of a sudden, ha, wonder why… and… and well, I have… questions.” He looked up at Thorin, still fidgeting, and nose twitching.

Adorable.

“You may ask me anything you like, Bilbo, though I would ask you to swear that any secrets I divulge to you about Durin’s folk be kept between us and us alone.”

“Of course!” Bilbo was quick to exclaim.

“Then I am at your service.”

“Have you… how… um…hm.” Bilbo lifted his fist to his mouth and bit down hard before blurting out in one quick breath, “have you had relations with other males?”

That was not the kind of question Thorin had expected to be asked so forthright. He blinked and his jaw dropped and he knew he was blushing as red as Bilbo was from the heat in his cheeks. *The poor hobbit must be very drunk indeed* , he thought wryly. Because Bilbo looked like he wanted to be shot by a poisoned arrow. Before the hobbit could make a hasty retreat, Thorin finally cleared his throat and answered truthfully.

“Yes, well, I’m just over two hundred years old, Bilbo. I’ve experimented in the past with both sexes. So, yes. But it has been a very long time since I’ve–”

The sound of a door closing shut cut off Thorin’s measured words. He looked up quickly to see that Bilbo had retreated back into his study, and by the look of the shadows beneath, he was leaning on the door. Then a soft, rhythmic knocking came from behind it along with some more muttering that Thorin could not make out, but that sounded like they might be curses.

Not knowing what to do, and beginning to panic that he’d somehow offended Bilbo, Thorin got up from his chair and began to pace. He got two cycles in when the study door burst open again with Bilbo appearing even more drunk and a red mark on his forehead.

“Pa-pardon my,” he belched, “s’cuse me, my hasty, eh, retreat. I had-had to think a bit more. One more question! Uh, are you really not, erm, going back? To-to Erebor? Be-because, I’d go back with you. You know? If-if you wanted to…”

“No, amral,” Thorin noticed the hobbit’s ear twitched at the endearment though he could not possibly know what it meant. “I do not wish to return to Erebor.”

“Or-or the Blue Mountains?”

“No. You forget, Bilbo.” He lifted his hand to his own bare cheek. “I am a shamed dwarf. I cannot go back.”

Bilbo’s mouth dropped open with an “Oh, you have nowhere else to go…” he trailed off while his eyes misted over.

“No, Bilbo, I have managed in the world of men for many years. I could go anywhere. But I choose here. I *chose* exile.”

“Ah, yes,” Bilbo cleared his throat and he rubbed his reddened nose. “Right.” He shut his eyes as if trying to recall something. “Why-why did you? I know you said why you shaved your beard… but why did you choose this?” He motioned clumsily around himself. “You fought so hard–”

“That was in the past,” Thorin interrupted gently. “You helped me reclaim the mountain for my people. I accomplished what I set out to do. And I paid a price for it. Now I have a second chance…” he moved slowly towards Bilbo who blinked drunken, teary eyes at him, rapt with attention. “By shaving my beard, no one will expect me to return. No one can force me to return–not that anyone could regardless. And you ask why *this,”* he motioned between them instead of around the smial, but Bilbo didn’t seem to notice. “I told you once already, why I was here.”

“To heal…” Bilbo whispered back. “To fix my plumbing,” he huffed a laugh but it was a weak thing.

“Yes. But I do not care for my own healing, Bilbo.” In the quietude of the room, Thorin's voice rang out with a resolute determination, cutting through the stillness like a blade. His words carried the weight of regret, the fervent desire to mend what had been fractured between them. His eyes, a deep well of sincerity, bore into Bilbo's, seeking solace and redemption. “I wish to heal what was broken between us. It is the only reason for my return, I am sure of it.”

With a dismissive wave of his hand, Bilbo sighed with annoyance. “I already forgave you.”

“That is all well and good, but I have not forgiven myself.” Bilbo frowned and was about to speak when Thorin continued. “The healing I seek extends far beyond mere words of absolution.” It was a journey of self-forgiveness, of righting the wrongs that plagued their once budding bond. “And I know my maker would want me to put a little more effort into reforging our bond, regardless of my madness, something like that cannot be forgiven so easily.”

Bilbo merely nodded along with what he said until the words caught up to him. He blinked rapidly and then snapped sobering, wary, eyes to Thorin's. "What… what did you break… between *us* ?"

With measured steps, Thorin closed the physical distance between them, closing the gap that had separated them for far too long. "Our friendship."

"Ah." And the face the hobbit gave him showed his clear disappointment before it transformed into something just *slightly* more neutral.

Thorin stepped closer, "And your trust."

He was too close, it seemed, because Bilbo had to look up to continue meeting his eyes. The hobbit scoffed nervously, "Well, I broke your trust first."

Thorin ignored that, because there was no room to dredge up the past once more. He lifted Bilbo's chin when the hobbit dropped it in shame. "What I regret the most, is breaking what … *could* have been…" he gave Bilbo a meaningful stare that he hoped Bilbo would understand despite his inebriation.

Bilbo, his features etched with a mixture of surprise and curiosity, listened intently as Thorin laid bare his intentions. The lines of worry etched upon his brow softened, mingling with a glimmer of cautious hope that danced within his eyes. "Oh?" Bilbo's voice trembled, hesitant yet filled with a glimmer of understanding.

Thorin's thumb rested on Bilbo's dimpled chin, and the hobbit made no move to extricate himself from the grip even if he did sway gently towards Thorin, as if a thread that connected both their hearts was reeling them in.

"Mhm," Thorin replied simply as he gently stroked the soft skin under Bilbo's lower lip. "So, I humbly ask that you allow me, though I have no right, to fix things… make things right again. To remake those lost opportunities." His words floated on a whisper and Thorin shook with longing. "Please say you'll allow it."

The hobbit blinked slowly, one eye opening as if to check that Thorin was still there before closing again. "I, well, okay…" he sighed and opened his eyes, still bleary with drink. "I have no idea what you're asking, to-to be quite frank, but" Bilbo sighed, "You could probably ask me anything, and I'll say yes," he admitted tiredly. Then his eyes widened as he realized what he'd said and flinched but still did not pull back. "Thorin?" He asked with such vulnerable confusion that Thorin could wait no more.

Thorin's lips, tender and cautious, brushed against the corner of Bilbo's supple mouth, a gentle touch that conveyed a world of unspoken emotions. It was a fleeting connection, a whisper of affection that carried the faint taste of lingering spirits. And his voice, low and intimate, danced upon the contours of Bilbo's jaw, "Does this clear things up a bit?"

The tremor of anticipation rippled through the air as Thorin leaned back, his eyes fixed upon Bilbo's face, awaiting the impact of his gesture. But before he could discern Bilbo's response, the hobbit plunged forward, burying his face against Thorin's chest. Fingers clenched tightly

around Thorin's collar, the fabric strained under the force of Bilbo's grip, his knuckles whitening with the intensity of his emotions.

“Oh goodness, I-I feel,” Bilbo muttered as he swayed violently.

In a swift and instinctive motion, Thorin enfolded Bilbo in his arms, effortlessly catching the hobbit as he wavered on the edge of fainting. With a strength born of both love and protectiveness, he cradled Bilbo against his chest, feeling the weightlessness of the hobbit's form as he carried him towards the sanctuary of his bedroom.

Gently laying Bilbo upon the soft expanse of the bed, Thorin's gaze softened as it roamed over the hobbit's features, etched with fatigue and vulnerability. Bilbo’s eyes were shut when Thorin leaned over and kissed his furrowed, sweaty brow–forcing his tongue back into his mouth after unintentionally getting a small taste. “If you still remember this in the morning, we can talk more.”

Just as Thorin began to withdraw, Bilbo's grip tightened around his sleeve, a feeble tug that pleaded for his presence. “Please don’t leave. You might be a dream, but please don’t leave.” The words that spilled from Bilbo's lips were laced with a mixture of desperation and uncertainty, a plea to shatter the illusion of a dream.

“I am not a dream, and I will stay.” Thorin met his gaze with unwavering assurance, dispelling any doubts that lingered within Bilbo's heart. “After I fetch a bucket just in case you get sick.” A soft smile curved his lips.

Bilbo finally and carefully opened his eyes. He sighed with relief and smiled tentatively back. “Okay.” He finally let Thorin go.

Wanting to be close to his One propelled his strides. He made his way towards the door, his mind already formulating a plan to alleviate the aftermath of Bilbo's choice in liquor. The image of Bilbo's pale complexion and the faint taste of alcohol upon his lips lingered in his mind, a stark reminder of the hobbit's fragility in that moment. With unwavering determination, he retraced his steps, bucket in hand, back towards Bilbo’s bedroom.

Yet, as he neared the threshold of their shared space, Thorin's gaze fell upon the remnants of their earlier tea, abandoned in its brewing chamber. A knowing smile graced his lips as he realized the perfect remedy for Bilbo's impending hangover. With practiced ease, he reached for the kettle, started the stove. The water within the kettle gradually warmed, its temperature rising to the optimal level for steeping the concoction that would soothe Bilbo's weary spirit. Thorin's hand deftly reached for the container of hangover tea, the aromatic blend of herbs wafting through the air as he carefully measured out the leaves, each ingredient carefully selected for its healing properties.

Thorin's hands cradled the teacup, its porcelain surface radiating a comforting heat. He took a steadying breath, a momentary pause just to take in what he’d done. If Bilbo even understood anything he’d said, drunk as he was. He sighed and strode forward. Bilbo was as he’d left him but with his eyes closed and breathing even. Thorin almost thought him asleep, but Bilbo’s nose twitched, which then prompted the hobbit’s eyes to open.

Thorin's chuckle reverberated through the room, a melodic sound that hinted at a deeper affection. He positioned himself at the edge of the bed, careful to ensure Bilbo's comfort as he placed the steaming cup of tea on the nearby night table, within easy reach. Bilbo grumbled, the remnants of his inebriation tugging at his speech, yet gratitude colored his words as he thanked Thorin for the fortifying beverage. The hobbit sipped rather daintily for one so deep in drink. It made Thorin grin like a fool in love.

“What?” Bilbo huffed with a confused smile. “Why are you looking at me… like… like that?” he ended breathlessly. “You–you looked at me like that… once. A long, long time ago.” His faint voice was as distant as his eyes.

Thorin cupped his cheek and caught Bilbo’s gaze, which sharpened. “I’m certain I looked at you like this far more than just once, Master Burglar.” His grin widened when Bilbo’s eyes did as well. “You just only caught me once,” he whispered and brought a finger to his own lips.

Bilbo’s eyes glinted with mirth and his cheeks pinked further. “I really must be dreaming.”

“I suppose you’ll find out tomorrow. For now,” Thorin began while unfastening Bilbo’s buttons and helping him undress, “you need some rest.” He ignored Bilbo’s meager attempt at propriety and swatted the hobbit’s hands away in order to get him down to his small clothes.

Quickly, and with an annoyed huff, Bilbo got under the covers and settled in.

“Thorin?”

“I will stay, amral. May I undress as well?” Again, Bilbo’s ears had twitched at the new endearment. And then Bilbo gasped as he finally caught up with Thorin’s request.

“Y-yes?” It sounded more like a question than anything else but Thorin took him at his word.

The room was hushed, filled only with the soft rustle of fabric as Thorin shed his own garments, stripping away the layers. As Thorin slipped beneath the covers, drawing near to Bilbo, their bodies nestled in a comforting embrace, he allowed the weight of the moment to settle upon them. His voice, a mere whisper, carried the promise of steadfast devotion.

“Sleep now,” Thorin commanded.

“I don’t think I can,” Bilbo whispered back.

So Thorin brought up his hand and raked through bronzed curls until Bilbo finally drifted to sleep.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow, Thorin would bare it all. He hoped Bilbo would remember their conversation upon waking and simply… act on the information without Thorin having to say another word. But knowing Bilbo… well, he never really did things by halves and was always full of surprises.

Maybe the surprise would be a good one. All the Valar knew Thorin needed a victory. Tomorrow. Tomorrow would be a good day for a victory.

Chapter End Notes

More to come!

End Notes

Now, I can't point you to my original works, but they do exist... out there... in a rainforest.

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