

The Guardian of Erebor

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Relationships:

[Bilbo Baggins/Thorin Oakenshield](#), [Bilbo Baggins & Thorin Oakenshield](#)

Characters:

[Bilbo Baggins](#), [Thorin Oakenshield](#), [Dís](#), [Frerin](#), [Gandalf](#), [Fíli](#), [Kíli](#), [Smaug](#), [Óin](#), [Glóin](#), [Dwalin](#), [Balin](#), [Bifur](#), [Bofur](#), [Bombur](#), [Dori](#), [Nori \(Tolkien\)](#), [Ori \(Tolkien\)](#), [Nori](#), [Ori - Character](#), [Elrond](#), [Thranduil](#), [Tauriel](#), [Legolas Greenleaf](#), [Bard's Children](#), [Bard of Laketown](#), [Tilda \(Hobbit Movies\)](#), [Sigrid \(Hobbit Movies\)](#), [Bain of Dale](#), [Dáin Ironfoot](#), [Lobelia Sackville-Baggins](#), [Thorin's Company](#), [Thrór's Canonical Wife](#), [Thráin](#), [Thrór](#), [Thráin's Canonical Wife](#), [Bolg](#), [Beorn](#), [Radagast](#), [Saruman](#)

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The Guardian of Erebor

by [FarGreenCountrySwiftSunrise](#)

Summary

Bella Baggins sacrificed herself to save the Shire when the dragon Smaug attacked. He used her to repair Erebor with her Hobbit abilities to fix broken things. When Thorin and his Company come to reclaim Erebor, there is no dragon, only a cursed Hobbit with golden dragon scales embedded in her skin. Bagginshield. Fem!Bilbo. Dragon AU. TW: Smaug is sadistic. He is emotionally, mentally, and physically abusive. Some suicidal thoughts and actions.

Prologue

Chapter Notes

A/N: This story was created because of the amazing pictures and prompts by fatynthemachine on Tumblr for the Hobbit Reverse Big Bang 2014. You can find the prompt images [here](#) and [here](#). Final draft [here](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fairy tales do not give a child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon. - *Tremendous Trifles* (1909), XVII: "The Red Angel" by G.K. Chesterton

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The First Entry of the Accounts of Belladonna Bilbo Baggins During Her Time as a Sacrifice to the Dragon Smaug

11 Halimath 1170 (2 September 2770 of the Third Age)

Dear... I suppose I would tell all of this to Lobelia, so, Dear Lobelia,

The dragon has "requested" that I keep detailed records of damages and repairs that he created during the taking of this place. He says some call it Erebor and others call it the Lonely Mountain. It doesn't matter. It's the dragon's now.

I found this empty journal in one of the houses. I should keep track of what I steal as well if, no, when someone comes to retake the mountain. The tales say that snow comes after fire and even dragons have their endings.

I hope they're right.

With All My Love,

Bella

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The Last Entry of the Accounts of Belladonna Bilbo Baggins During Her Time as a Sacrifice to the Dragon Smaug

1 Winterfilth 1340 (22 September 2940 of the Third Age)

Dear Lobelia,

I realized today that I consider Erebor my home now. It has been my home for a long time. I healed its ravaged halls and those who had fallen I lay to rest in stone. I hope he is dead though I can feel him still. He has not called me for sixty years. Though when he does, he will be surprised by how I have grown.

I have thought up a wonderful birthday present to give everyone, though it will be sometime before I can give it properly. If I don't succeed on the gift, then I will succeed in seeing you again, my dear friend.

With All My Love,

Bella

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Here is the start of my Hobbit Reverse Big Bang fic for 2014! Thank you so much fatynthemachine for letting me play with your story concept. The title of this fic is inspired by this [post](#).

Chapter I: Dragon Scales

Chapter Summary

In which certain Dwarves remember a certain Hobbit as they reclaim Erebor.

Chapter Notes

A/N: For those reading this before I changed the prologue, here is the final draft of the HRBB14 [prompt pictures](#). Aren't they gorgeous?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Alphonse: I won't leave you! I'm sick of watching people die! And I can't just sit back and take it anymore! I won't let anyone else get killed! Not when I can protect them! - From *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* - "Death of the Undying"

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Frerin could not find Dis. People ran and screamed around him, but not one of them was his baby sister. He could smell smoke and something rotting come from the entrance of Erebor and it was getting closer.

"Frerin!" Dis screamed as she latched onto Frerin's leg, "What's happening?"

In one motion, Frerin picked up his sister and began running to the main entrance. "Dragon."

"Dragon? Papa will take care of it, won't he?" Dis asked as she clung to her brother's neck.

"I hope so, Dis," Frerin said.

There was a roar and a great crash as one of the pillars was knocked down by a blur of red. It crashed onto the people in front of Frerin and Dis. Dust and smoke choked the survivors. Frerin dove to the ground, hoping to find air. People knocked into him as they continued running. He covered Dis with his body, trying to keep her from being crushed.

After a minute of this, people started screaming in pain instead of panic. A roar shook the room.

Someone pulled Frerin to his feet. "Come on," a female voice said. She continued dragging Frerin towards the fallen pillar. "The rest of the way is clear. You need to get over it and then you'll be safe. He's going after the treasure, not people right now. Well, only those in his way."

Frerin caught a glimpse of the woman. She wore a tattered but colorful dress that reached just below her knees. Her hair and eyes were golden... as were the scales scattered across her face, arms, and legs.

"What... what are you?" Frerin asked.

"Not important," the woman said. She hopped on top of the fallen pillar and offered her hand to Frerin. Another roar echoed in the hallway.

"What does he want now?" the woman growled.

Frerin could hear the dragon coming towards them. "I thought you said he wasn't coming after people!"

"Well maybe he changed his mind! I don't know him that well!" the woman said. She ripped two scales off her right

arm revealing newer, softer scales underneath. "Both of you carry one. He'll think you're me for a moment and not eat you. Run! Go now!"

The dragon came running towards them, smoke curling from his nostrils. "WHERE ARE YOU?"

"Run!" the woman screamed as she smacked Frerin on the back.

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Frerin felt the smack on his back again. "Come on before I eat your breakfast," Kíli said.

The second son of Thráin remembered where he really was. He was not trapped in Erebor being chased by a dragon, but instead outside of the Lonely Mountain chasing the dragon. The change in circumstance was almost humorous to Frerin.

What was not putting Frerin in a good mood was his youngest nephew's cheerful attitude.

"How. Are. You. Awake. You. Blasted. Pitiful. Excuse. For. A. Dwarf," Frerin growled.

"I had third watch," Kíli said, "Uncle Thorin wants you to talk to him."

"Course he does," Frerin grumbled as he began to pack up his sleeping roll, "Always needs to talk. The Dwarf never does anything but talk. It's Durin's Day and he has not shut up since that stupid wizard met up with him back in March."

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Thorin put a bowl of porridge into Frerin's hands as the younger Dwarf sat next to him. "I won't save you a serving next time you decide to sleep in," Thorin said.

"We're not all burdened with glorious purpose to wake us up in the morning, brother," Frerin said, "Thanks."

"You really shouldn't spoil him like that," Dis said as she sharpened one of her axes.

"You're spoiled all the time," Frerin said as he shoveled food to his mouth.

"Name one time," Dis said.

"You're on this trip," Dwalin said before getting smacked by his elder brother.

Balin's intervention did not stop a fight between Dis and Dwalin. While the rest of the camp was entertained by the argument (sans Gandalf, who was looking at the mountain with ever growing suspicion), Thorin took the opportunity to speak with Frerin.

"You will still do as I asked you before we left," Thorin stated.

Frerin nodded. "Take Dis and the children and run until we can't anymore if Smaug can't be killed."

"Yes," Thorin said.

Frerin nodded. "I'll knock you out and drag us with us if you haven't done something stupid to get yourself killed."

Thorin growled his displeasure.

Frerin rolled his eyes. "You may be alright with dying, but I am not alright with you dying. If you haven't figured that out by now, you're denser than the rocks you eat."

Thorin covered his eyes. "I was twelve and it was a dare. Will you ever let up about it?"

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"Can you sense if the dragon is here?" Thorin asked Gandalf quietly as they began their trek for the day.

"The only thing I can sense is that a certain Dwarf will be smacked over the head with my staff if he continues pestering me with silly questions," Gandalf said.

Frerin mumbled, "You know, we can have Óin examine you for that stick up your..."

Gandalf smacked Frerin with his staff. "Dwarves," the wizard huffed.

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"This seems to be it," Thorin said as the Company stood on a shelf of rock.

"I thought it would be a bit more... ostentatious," Kíli said.

"It's a miracle. Kíli knows a word longer than two-syllables," Ori said before being smacked by Kíli.

"We still have to wait until the last light of Durin's Day," Balin said.

"Well, sunset should be in about an hour," Fíli said.

Bifur spoke in Khuzdul. *"You idiot. It's a riddle. The last light is the moon you numbskull."*

"Bifur is correct. The moon is what we must wait for. Moon runes? Last light?" Gandalf said. He sighed. "What I would give for a riddle lover about now."

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The key fit perfectly and the door opened with hardly a sound. Then the entire host of Dwarves tripped over each other and fell on top of Thorin.

"Ori, if you put that in the records, I will kill you," Thorin groaned as the Company tried to untangle themselves.

"I may already be dead if Bombur doesn't get off me," Ori gasped.

"I think I'm already dead," Frerin said as he, Thorin, and Dis were the ones at the bottom of the pile.

After a few minutes, the Company of Thorin Oakenshield pretended that they did not act like anxious Dwarfings when the door opened. Thorin said, "Here is our home. Long has been the road and difficult the path we have taken. At last, we can reclaim our homeland." He turned to Gandalf. "It is now your turn, wizard, to see if the dragon is truly dead or not."

Gandalf nodded. "It is. Keep the door open. It will be safer for you to run into the tunnel then to attempt to run from the dragon if I awaken him."

Thorin nodded. "The blessing of Mahal upon you, Gandalf."

The wizard crouched down and made his way into the darkened tunnel.

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Bella had just finished putting in the last of the vegetables she needed for her soup into a pot when she sensed something step on a pile of gold coins. She growled, “I organized those coins!” She took off her apron and marched towards the treasury. “I put them by country of origin, era, weight, and alphabetized them! I will not let any raven mess up what took me over a decade to complete!”

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Thorin had run his hand over the stone walls as soon as the wizard had disappeared from sight. It had been so long since he had been home and he wanted to remember every bit of it. Dwalin and Dis remembered the least of home. Balin remembered a bit more than Thorin.

Frerin had remained silent and had stroked his golden charm. It hung off a silver chain and was wrapped in a silver cage as nothing the Dwarves had could pierce it. The second son of Thráin remembered the woman who had saved him and Dis from the dragon. Thráin and Thrór had doubted Frerin and Dis’ story of the woman with golden scales, but Thorin had believed that they had seen something. It was not until the Battle of Azanulbizar that Thorin believed the story in its entirety. The golden scale had been the only reason Frerin had survived a spear to the chest as it deflected most of the blow.

“The only thing that could do such is either mithril or a dragon’s scale,” Thorin had said to Frerin after the battle.

The elder prince was barely standing and clinging to his oaken branch. "It's not the first so it must be the second."

"But what was she?" Frerin said.

"I do not know, but I intend to find out who saved my siblings," Thorin said.

Dis took Frerin's hand and gave it a squeeze. "We are almost home," she said.

"Hopefully," Frerin said.

The wizard came out of the tunnel.

"What did you see? Is the dragon alive? Did you find the Arkenstone?" Thorin said.

"A moment," Gandalf said as he caught his breath. He leaned against his staff.

"I would like to know if we are about to be roasted," Bofur said.

"I am getting to that," Gandalf said.

"Can you get to it any faster?" Dori said.

"A moment! Honestly, Dwarves," Gandalf said. He leaned against his staff as he continued. "I made it to the treasury and... the treasure is there but there is no dragon."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Dun dun DUNNNNNNN! I am posting this a bit early as I am going to the Hobbit marathon tomorrow. (I AM NOT READY FOR THIS PAIN!)

Chapter II: Memorial

Chapter Summary

The Company of Thorin Oakenshield enters Erebor and Bella thinks they are thieves.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“What do you mean there is no dragon?” Thorin said.

“I could not find Smaug in the treasure room. That may have signaled that he was elsewhere in Erebor, but there was also no stench of dragon in the room,” Gandalf said, “Not a whiff of burning sulfur or slime. I almost could have sworn I smelled flowers, but that may just be a... hope on my part.”

“Couldn’t he have just left without anyone knowing?” Kíli said.

“No, the front gate would not have been blocked. It is the only place large enough for the dragon to fit,” Balin said.

“There is something else,” Gandalf said, “The treasure has... an unusual amount of organization for a dragon hoard.”

“What do mean by that?” Dis said.

“Dragons do not care how their hoard is arranged as long as they can lay on it. The treasury seemed to be organized by type of treasure. There were piles of goblets separate from the piles of gold coins. Gemstones were at the far end

of the room, but I did not wish to go too deeply into the mountain if there might be a dragon waiting for me. I am nearly certain he is not here,” Gandalf said.

“Could he have died? It has been sixty years,” Fíli said.

“Though possible, there should have been bones in the treasure room and the smell of a rotting dragon carcass,” Gandalf said.

“So where does that leave us?” Frerin said.

“We will have to search Erebor to find Smaug,” Gandalf said.

There was uproar from the Dwarves. “It’s one thing to try and take the Arkenstone before getting reinforcements, but another to go straight into the dragon’s den,” was the general direction of the conversation.

“Enough!” Thorin said, “Gandalf, are you quite certain the dragon is not within Erebor?”

“If he is, he is dead. My knowledge of Erebor is limited and I do not know its secrets,” Gandalf said, “That is why I am requesting the help of those Dwarves who used to call Erebor home.”

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Bella spoke to herself as she organized the coins that had fallen out of their organized piles. “Honestly, I thought the ravens would know better to come down here. Maybe rats? I’ll have to add extra protections to my supplies. Maybe I should...”

She froze. It took Bella a moment to remember what noise that was; it was the sound of boots stepping on stone. She gasped. "Thieves! Here! Vultures! I will certainly show them for trying to take from a mountain that is not there home." She scrambled up the mounds of treasures to one of the platforms. "This place is for the Dwarves of Erebor, not the Mortal Men of Laketown."

Bella perched herself on a shelf in a corner. She waited for the thieves to come out of the back entrance. With how high up she was and the angle she was at, she could see them, but not vice versa. She liked calling the small passageway the doorstep. Smaug had hated it and said it caused a draft, but there had been a strong magic in the stone that Bella could not alter, so the doorstep had remained.

There were soft whispers as several male voices discussed something as they neared the treasure room. Bella was unsure exactly what they said, but by the tone of their voices it sounded like they were planning an attack.

So, the scout knows that there is no dragon in the treasury and now they have brought in the search party. Interesting. Not complete idiots then.

Bella almost fell off her perch when the first thief entered the treasury.

A DWARF? THERE ARE DWARVES BACK IN THE MOUNTAIN?

The dark-haired Dwarf paused at the edge of the platform and seemed awestruck by the gold. A bit too awestruck in Bella's opinion, but she had never understood the attraction to gold. It was just shiny rocks. Nice looking, shiny rocks, yes, but not nearly as important as a good

potato harvest. Some of the books had said gold was sacred to Dwarves because they represented memories and were done to honor Mahal. Whether this was a common belief or not, Bella could not say.

Another dark-haired Dwarf came out of the tunnel with a torch and smacked the first Dwarf with his empty hand. The first Dwarf shook his head and rubbed his eyes with his left hand as his right hand held a long sword.

"It's bigger than I remember," a third dark haired Dwarf said. He had more blond streaks in his hair than the first two.

"That's because this is not all ours, Frerin," the first Dwarf said. He motioned with his long sword to the coins near them. "Those coins are from Dale. Smaug has gathered treasure from other places."

"He wasn't content with all of this?" a blond Dwarf said.

"No, Fíli. Dragons are greedy for greed's sake," the second Dwarf said.

"We need to spread out and find the Arkenstone and the dragon," the first Dwarf said. He pointed to each Dwarf as he said their names. "Dis, you are to work with Fíli, Kíli, and Óin in here to find the Arkenstone. Bifur, you will guard the door. Dwalin you will lead one group and I'll lead the other. Balin will go with you as a guide. You'll also take Ori, Glóin, and Bofur. Frerin, Dori, Nori, and Bombur, you're with me. Do you have a preference, Gandalf?"

"I think I shall join you, Thorin," the only non-Dwarf said. He was an old man wearing grey robes, a silver scarf, and a blue hat. An odd creature he was and, even stranger, Bella

felt like she recognized him. That was nonsense since everyone she knew was dead.

“Let’s move out. We will be back in two hours. If we do not return in that time, leave,” Thorin said.

Dis began to speak, “I won’t leave my...”

“I do not ask this as your brother, but as your king, Dis,” Thorin said.

Dis bit his lip and nodded.

The group of Dwarves set out to explore left the treasury (Dis, Fíli, Kíli, and Óin) went to the piles of gems. Bifur, the one with an ax in his head, went back to the platform by the doorstep. When all attention was gone from the doorway that led to the rest of Erebor, Bella crept away to follow the search parties.

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“Don’t set my hair on fire,” Dori growled at Nori.

“You’re moving too slow,” Nori said.

“Bombur, if they continue like this, I give you permission to cuff them,” Thorin said.

Bombur let out a pleased “Hmmp” noise and waved his ladle menacingly.

“I’m not sure we should trust you with guiding us,” Frerin said, “Do you remember that time just after we settled in the Blue Mountains and...”

“I remember,” Thorin said.

“Or that time in Minas Tirith...”

“Yes.”

“Or that time in Bree when...”

“Bombur, please smack my brother. My hands are full,” Thorin said.

“Ouch. Thanks a lot,” Frerin growled.

“There should be more damage to these halls,” Thorin said.

“Um... Thorin,” Frerin said.

“What story are you going to try to embarrass me with now?” Thorin sighed.

“I don’t remember that being here... ever,” Frerin said as he held up a torch to a statue.

It was of a soldier carrying an ax as tall as himself. There were runes that translated into Westron as, “Here lies a knight who fell defending the heart of the kingdom of Erebor from dragon fire. May Mahal grant him peace.”

“What is this?” Thorin said.

“It is a memorial,” Gandalf said.

“Yes, but how? I find it doubtful a dragon would regret a slaughter,” Thorin said.

“I do not know how, but my suspicion has been confirmed. There was someone at some point in Erebor besides the dragon. Smaug would never have been able to create this work,” Gandalf said.

"It's good," Frerin said as he gently placed his hand on the statue, "Fine craftsmanship. It's like they listened to the stone on how to create the statue."

"A Dwarf then," Dori said.

"Most likely," Thorin said.

Gandalf made a non-committal noise. "We should keep moving, but stay aware of the shadows."

Thorin waited for Frerin to catch up to him as they continued to explore Erebor. "Frerin, how long would that statue of taken?"

"A few months at the least," Frerin said, "Not the most intricate of statues. I saw one in Minas Tirith where the veil over the woman's face looked like it was made of the thinnest of cloth instead of marble. Thing of beauty it was. Made several centuries ago."

"Frerin..."

"Right. Off topic. No someone spent... hang on," Frerin said. He motioned to Thorin to follow him. "This place had a pillar fall. I was there."

"There is no fallen pillar," Thorin said.

"Exactly, we may have multiple people hiding here. No one person could do that," Frerin said.

"Just our luck," Thorin grumbled.

"Maybe a wizard did it," Dori said, "Gandalf, did you not say once there are five of you?"

“Yes, but it was not a wizard who did this,” Gandalf said, “There are other creatures in this world with powerful magic, if they bother to use it.”

“Why wouldn’t they use it?” Nori said, “If it could help them and protect them...”

“It is too much of a hassle and not very proper according to the creatures I am thinking of,” Gandalf said.

“By all the... Thorin, look at this,” Frerin said.

The Dwarves held up their torches and Gandalf held up his staff. It was a high-relief mural carved into the walls of the mountain. The scene was full of life: families, friends, warriors, and people of all classes mingling together.

“Here lies fifty-three of those who perished when they went to the mines to escape from the dragon Smaug,” Gandalf translated into Westron, “From stone they were made and to stone they are returned. May Mahal grant them peace.”

Thorin put away his sword and gently touched a vambrace worn by one of the Dwarves. “This is Sindri’s.”

“Amazing blacksmith,” Frerin said.

“He started teaching me about the craft even though I wasn’t old enough to work yet,” Thorin said.

“The forges are near enough to the mines that he could have gone there with his family,” Frerin said.

The faces were generic Thorin now realized, but by the symbols on the clothing and jewelry it looked like Sindri stood together with his brother and sister. “It is possible. Highly possible.”

Dori spoke softly, "This would have taken some time just to bring the bodies up to the public areas, wouldn't you say? Someone wanted them to be mourned properly."

"Do you think someone survived?" Nori asked.

Thorin's hand went to his side and tightened into a fist.

"We cannot hope that. We are to assume it is someone who may not want us here. We need to be cautious."

"Speaking of which, we need to get back before Dis has our heads," Frerin said.

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Bella kept her distance from the group with their apparent leader, Thorin. From her studies in Erebor's library, she knew that Dwarves reused names out of honor for the dead. The strange sensation of lightness in her heart she would not allow to settle. It never did any good. Thorin was a common enough name.

Thorin's group returned to the treasury where Dwalin's group had already arrived. The Dwarves were searching through the piles of jewels. Bella remained hidden in the darkness of the hallway.

"I think it's safe to say there is no dragon found so far," Dwalin said.

"No, but there seems to have been repair since the dragon came," Thorin said.

"We saw it as well. There were some walls I know were destroyed during the attack that were whole save that the gold had been removed," Balin said.

“And the art,” Bombur added.

“Aye, there’s that. Doubt the worm would do that,” Bofur said.

“No, he would not,” Gandalf said. He sat on a pile of gold coins.

“You have not found the Arkenstone yet?” Thorin asked.

“No. Everything else is quite organized, but the Arkenstone is not where I thought it would be,” Dis said.

“Keep looking. Gandalf, do you have any idea what happened to Smaug and why there are memorials made for the fallen? And can there be multiple people here?” Thorin asked.

“Thorin Oakenshield, if I knew any information that would keep your Company safe, I would tell you,” Gandalf said.

Bella nearly passed out. *They have to be lying. It’s a lie. He doesn’t look at all like a prince should. They’re supposed to be golden-haired and clad in shining armor. He can’t be the King’s grandson. Because that would mean... that what I did was... that I didn’t have to...* She covered her mouth and focused on not sobbing. *Vanity of vanities... vanity of vanities; all is vanity. If I had just waited a few months...*

“We shouldn’t sleep in here, just in case the dragon is still alive,” Thorin said, “We’ll sleep in the secret passage until morning. Then we’ll continue our search for both the dragon and the Arkenstone.”

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Bella bit her hand as she listened to the Dwarves settle in for the night. She tried to convince herself that it was all a lie. They were thieves using false names to try and gain trust from her.

But no one knows you are here.

And then someone sang. Bella was not sure who began it, but all of the Dwarves joined in. She could see the man called Gandalf sitting at the door of the treasury smoking on his pipe.

“Far over the misty mountains cold./To dungeons deep, and caverns old./We must away, 'ere break of day./To find our long forgotten gold./The pines were roaring on the height./The winds were moaning in the night./The fire was red, it flaming spread./The trees like torches blazed with light.”

The song went on, but Bella's heart twisted with longing that she had tried to kill decades ago. As they sang, the Hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through her, a fierce and a jealous love, the desire of the hearts of Dwarves.

Things you'll never get again. There is no going back to the Shire. This is home now.

The Hobbit part of her that she had suppressed for so long came back to her at the thought of the Shire.

You didn't even serve tea to your guests. What type of host are you? You are a Baggins. You are a respectable Hobbit and yet you can't take care of your guests! Honestly!

When the song had ended, Bella went back into the mountain to make preparations for her guests. She was

quite upset when she found out her soup was burned. After all, she had to be careful with her supplies if she was to feed fifteen Dwarves and a possible wizard along with herself.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I should mention at this point that all of the chapters except for twenty and twenty-one were written before I saw BOTFA. Make of it as you will.

I included “The Misty Mountains Cold” for three reasons. 1. It’s pretty. 2. Angst. 3. As the following [post](#) said, it’s the reason Bilbo went on the adventure in the first place.

In case I get asked this question, Bella has not yet realized that Dis is a woman. (“It’s the beards.”)

“Pompeii” is one of my play-on-repeat-until-my-ears-fall-off songs. Apologizes for anyone who is sick of the song. The line “a wizard did it” is a reference to the time-sucking website [TV Tropes](#). (Only click the link if you are willing to waste several hours.)

Chapter III: The Feast

Chapter Summary

In which Bella is a polite host to her Dwarven guest... if you ignore the death threats.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Begging your Majesties’ pardons all,” said Rhince, “but why not fall to while you’re discussing it? We don’t see a dinner like this every day.”

“Not for your life!” said Caspian.

“That’s right, that’s right,” said several of the sailors. “Too much magic about here.”

....

“I really think,” said Edmund, “they’re right... We daren’t eat the food and there’s no point in staying here for the night. The whole place smells of magic - and danger.” -
From *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin felt like he had just fallen asleep when he heard Dis whisper to him. “Thorin, you need to wake up. Something has happened. No one is hurt, but it is strange.”

He opened his eyes and got to his feet. “What is it?” Thorin asked.

“It’s easier if I show you,” Dis said.

Glóin had been the one on watch and he motioned to the treasure room. “I had just gone outside for a moment and told my brother to keep watch. Sometime when we switched back, that was there.”

Thorin squinted at the treasure and saw a sapphire resting on top of a pile of gold coins that was near the doorway that led to the rest of Erebor. “You woke me up because of a gem.”

“It wasn’t there when Óin and I switched,” Glóin said.

A silver coin was tossed next to the sapphire from the main entrance of the treasury.

Dis drew her ax as Thorin said, “Wake up! Someone else is here!”

The Dwarves were on their feet with weapons drawn in a moment... except for Bofur. “Where’s my hat? Someone stole my hat!”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Nori said, “Who would steal that ratty old thing?”

Bofur’s hat was tossed on top of the silver coin and the sapphire.

“Brazen, aren’t they?” Dis said.

“My hat!” Bofur cried out before pushing past Thorin and Dis to get to his beloved hat.

“It’s dangerous to go alone!” Ori said as he tossed Bofur’s mattock, “Take this with you!”

“Thanks lad. FOR MY HAT!” Bofur said as he went to grab his hat and chase after the person who had stolen said hat.

“Bofur get back here!” Nori said as he chased after the miner.

“Idiots, all of them,” Thorin mumbled as he led the rest of the Company to the treasure room to hopefully save Bofur from being killed.

Bofur snatched his hat and ran towards the tunnel. “Come back here thief!”

“I refuse to be associated with a hat theft!” Nori said. They both stopped at the tunnel entrance and were slammed into by the other Dwarves and Gandalf.

“Why did you stop?” Thorin said.

“There’s a trail of gems. Whole bunch of different ones. They go up the stairs,” Bofur said.

“A trail?” Frerin said.

“Well... this is a trap,” Kíli said.

“Can you see the thief?” Thorin said.

“I will not be associated with this moron. What thief returns what they stole?” Nori said.

“Fine then. Can you see the burglar?” Thorin said.

“No, we’ll have to go in,” Bofur said.

Dwalin took the lead with Nori close behind him. They walked two by two up three flights of stairs. There was a light coming from behind a doorway that was partially

opened. A pile of gold was built into a little pyramid at the opening.

With a few hand motions, Glóin held the door handle and the rest prepared to enter the room. On the silent count of three, the Company charged into the room to find... a long dining table full of food.

Served on wooden dishware was a simple and large breakfast. There was fresh baked bread, scones, biscuits, pound cake, jams, cheese, butter, and a large bowl of oatmeal. The Company sans Gandalf moved around the table cautiously. The wizard stood by the door and hummed as he thought.

“What sorcery is this?” Dori asked.

“None save that from a good meal,” Gandalf said.

“If it’s not magic, it’s poisoned,” Dwalin said.

Frerin elbowed his elder brother. “Um, Thorin, I am going to guess that this is for you.”

At the head of a table on an empty plate was an envelope with the words “To Mr. Oakenshield” written on the cover. Thorin broke the seal with no insignia and read the letter out loud. It was written in Westron.

Dear Mr. Oakenshield (or whoever you might really be),

There is breakfast for you and your companions. You will find behind one of the doors a pantry and behind another a kitchen. There should be enough food for three days if your company eats like Mortal Men.

It's not poisoned. If I wanted to kill you, I would not ruin perfectly good food over it. No, I deal with thieves with much more... creativity, shall we say?

I do have a request. You are to go out onto the doorstep (how you first entered the Lonely Mountain) at noon. There will be certain ravens who shall confirm whether or not you are one of Thrór's descendants.

If you are the one called Oakenshield... things will go well for you Thorin, son of Thráin, son of Thrór, King Under the Mountain. I shall return your home to you with no resistance.

If you are not Oakenshield and have stolen his name, then I will make you wish you had faced Smaug.

Enjoy your meal!

Sincerely,

Underhill

The last part of the note was written in Khuzdul.

P.S. Do you know how old the man who claims to be the wizard Gandalf is? Or at least as long as your people have known him?

"Our burglar is curious about you, Gandalf," Thorin said.

Gandalf looked over Thorin's shoulder. "Ah. An honest concern if the burglar is an older creature. I think he is listening in so you might as well say it out loud."

"I have known Gandalf the Grey all my life, just as my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather knew him and

many more of my ancestors,” Thorin said.

A small gold pendant smacked Frerin in the head. “What’s this?”

Gandalf held out his hand for Frerin to pass the pendant. “This pendant is based off of the agrimony flower.”

“Does that mean something?” Dwalin asked.

“Yes. Thankfulness. I think the burglar is thanking you for responding,” Gandalf said.

“That means he’s near!” Dwalin said drawing forth his axes.

“He would not have given us this if he thought that we could catch him. He is long gone,” Thorin said.

Ori wrinkled his nose as he thought. “Most Dwarves don’t know that much about growing things. Most know about medicinal plants and food. Some jewelers know about the different flowers because of commissions, but we don’t deal much with the realm of the Mahal’s Wife.”

“Yes, an interesting clue,” Gandalf said.

“I still think it’s a trap,” Kíli said.

“A possibility, though doubtful,” Gandalf said.

“How do we even test it? We can’t just eat it,” Fíli said.

Everyone turned to Bombur who already had taken a bite from one of the biscuits. “I’m good with dying if it means I don’t have to take another bite of cram,” Bombur said, “Besides, it doesn’t taste odd. No bitter almonds or anything like that.”

"It could be iocane power. It is odorless, tasteless, dissolves instantly in liquid, and is among the more deadlier poisons known to Free Folk," Óin said.

Bombur looked at the oatmeal and then back up at the Company. "How long before I die?"

"If it is poisoned, we should know within a few minutes," Óin said.

Bombur began filling up his plate. The Company looked on in horror. "What? If I'm going to die..."

Thorin, for neither the first nor last time, was grateful that Smaug seemed to be nowhere near them.

"We should check on the other rooms. Make sure there are no other traps," Dwalin said.

"This is not a trap," Gandalf said. He sat down at the table and also began filling his plate. "Go on then. I'll be waiting."

The kitchen and pantry were both small, but clean and stocked with enough food for roughly three days. Save for the cookware, all of the dishes were made from wood. The food was meatless, but was good. The taps from the sink could only bring cold water, but it was a good sign that the plumbing still worked and the water was clean.

"Are either of you dead yet?" Frerin said.

"No, and this oatmeal is rather good," Bombur said.

Glóin said, "No wine, plenty of ale though."

"These barrels have Erebor's mark on them," Dori said.

“Someone made ale here,” Óin said too loudly.

“You should come eat before the oatmeal is cold,” Gandalf said.

Óin shrugged. “If it was fast acting, they would be dead by now.”

“A slow death, wonderful,” Thorin muttered. He rubbed his eyes. “I will rely on Gandalf’s judgment and Bombur’s stomach. Bifur, Dori, take what food you need and go back to the passage. This may be a distraction.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

“The food is bewitched, wizard,” Thorin hissed at Gandalf as they left the dining room. The Company set up a watch to keep track of the food. Bofur and Nori were in charge of the first shift.

“Why would you say that?” Gandalf said.

“It... it was too good,” Thorin said.

Gandalf chuckled. “Too good? You say that the food must have been bewitched because it was *too good*?”

“It sounds ridiculous when you say it, but yes. It was not a normal meal. I have eaten meals after starving, after battle, after joy, and after grief. None of them left me as content as that meal,” Thorin said.

“Yes, I think we have our host to thank for that,” Gandalf said.

“You know who or what it is?” Thorin said.

"I grow more sure by the hour. The note's wording was also a hint. Have no fear. The meal will not harm you or your companions. It is simply a good meal for guests," Gandalf said.

"And the request the burglar gave?" Thorin said.

"Reasonable if our host is not sure of who we are. The ravens would not betray the Dwarves of Erebor and yet they seem to know our host well enough to relay messages. A neutral and trustworthy party," Gandalf said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

"I don't think you'll be shot," Dwalin said as he reentered the tunnels from the "doorstep" as the burglar had called it.

"Pleasant thought," Thorin said, "Balin, Frerin, Dwalin, come. Everyone else keep looking for the Arkenstone."

Balin, Dwalin, Frerin, and Thorin sat on the doorstep as the sun climbed overhead. Gandalf joined them soon after to smoke his pipe.

Balin spoke first. "This may work well for us. Ravens live many a year, and their memories are long, and they hand on their wisdom to their children. I knew many among the ravens of the rocks when I was a dwarf-lad. Ravenhill was called such because there was a wise and famous pair, old Carc and his wife, that lived there about the guard-chamber."

As if waiting for his cue, a decrepit raven with a balding head descended amongst the Dwarves with two younger ravens at its side. "Greetings Thorin and Frerin sons of Thráin and Balin and Dwalin sons of Fundin. Greetings,

Gandalf the Grey. I am Roäc son of Carc," he croaked.
"Carc is dead, but he was well known to you once. It is a hundred and fifty-three years since I came out of the egg, but I do not forget what my father told me. Now I am the chief of the great ravens of the Mountain. We are few, but we remember still the king of old."

"Greetings to you, Roäc son of Carc. It is an honor to meet you," Thorin said.

"You have many questions," Roäc stated.

"We do, yes," Balin said.

"Do you know of what happened to Smaug? And who it is who called this meeting?" Thorin asked.

Roäc nodded his head. "I must answer the second to answer the first. The person who sent us has no name known to us, but we call it the Guardian. It is a creature with no beard, but of similar height to the Dwarves. Its skin, hair, and eyes are golden and it even has scales, yet it is not cold like snakes or lizards."

Frerin elbowed Thorin at the description. He mouthed, *the woman*. Thorin shook his head for silence.

The old raven continued without noticing Frerin's side conversation. "The Guardian lived in the Mountain before we ravens returned about a decade ago. The dragon still lived then, but slept deeply. The Guardian told us around this past Mortal Men's New Year that the dragon had died and his corpse was being dealt with."

"The dragon is dead according to the Guardian," Thorin said.

“Yes, and we believe the Guardian. The air is not as foul, though not many green things have begun to grow,” Roäc said.

“So Smaug is dead, but something else resides in the Mountain,” Frerin said.

“Is there anything else you can tell us about the Guardian?” Thorin said.

“Nay, nothing else. It is very kind to us ravens, though it has told us that it will not give us any treasure as the gold belongs neither to us nor it. I believe you will find not a gold coin missing from your grandfather’s treasury,” Roäc said.

“A creature that wants no treasure,” Gandalf muttered.

“Roäc son of Carc, I ask that we restore the friendship of our people,” Thorin said, “Gold and other things shall be given to you as payment and, when living things grow again, some of our food as well.”

“Fine things indeed,” Roäc said, “And you want messages sent out?”

“Yes, to the Iron Hills and the Blue Mountains,” Thorin said.

“Not to the Men of the Lake? The descendants of Dale reside there,” Roäc said.

“They can wait until known allies come here,” Thorin said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella sat at Ravenhill with a basket of treats and waited for the return of Roäc and his children. The sun was cooler than earlier in the year, but still pleasant enough to bask under. The Hobbit wanted to enjoy the sun as long as she could before it was too late.

A fluttering of wings alerted Bella to the ravens return. She smiled at the birds and set out on a wooden plate with some fruit. The ravens partook of their snack before giving their report.

"It is indeed Thorin, son of Thráin, son of Thrór, King Under the Mountain," Roäc said, "I would recognize that beak to be of the Line of Durin even with my failing eyesight."

Bella felt a twist in the area that used to be her heart. She ignored it and nodded to Roäc. "That is good news for Erebor and for the area that surrounds it. What of the Dwarf himself?"

"What of him?" Roäc asked.

"Is he... a good man? I mean, is he a good egg?" Bella asked. She looked down at her hands. "The tales of him speak of a Dwarf of courage and honor. One who cares for his people and not of his own glory. Tales are often wrong."

"He has offered us payment and food. None of his companions seem wary of him. I am sure he will be kind to the one who cared for his home," Roäc said.

That bird always understands things far too well.

"He... you were frightened of me. Why would they not be?" Bella said.

“They will find you eventually. It is better to do so now then later,” Roäc advised. He cackled. “Besides, the wizard might help you.”

“So he is a wizard? Is he Gandalf?” Bella asked.

“He is indeed. I have known him since before I could fly,” Roäc said.

Gandalf won't remember a fauntling. I look nothing like I used to before... before Smaug.

“Thank you, Roäc,” Bella said. She took out some wrapped meat. “I had to slaughter one of my goats earlier this week. I pickled this if that is alright.”

“Meat! Thank you, Guardian,” Roäc said.

Bella got up and made the long trek back inside Erebor. She had an item to give back to its rightful owner.

BbBbBbBbBbBb

“Dis, Roäc son of Carc said that he saw the woman who saved us,” Frerin said when he reached Dis in the treasury.

“He said no such thing,” Thorin said, “He said that he saw someone with gold scales. It may not be the person who helped you.”

“But Thorin, how many people like that do you think there are?” Dis said.

Thorin sighed. “I know you wish to thank the woman who saved you as I wish to thank the one who saved my kin, but think for a moment of what it would mean if she still lived. She either worked for Smaug and had a moment of guilt or

she has been his prisoner for almost two centuries. Would you wish that upon the woman who saved you?"

"I didn't think of it like that," Frerin said softly.

Thorin patted Frerin's shoulder. "I know you meant no ill, Frerin. Let us hope that the person who saved you has had a good life and that this is someone different."

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin prepared to bed down for the night. They had heard nothing from the burglar since breakfast. It worried the Dwarven King and he wondered what the burglar was planning.

He frowned at his sleeping roll. There was a lump that had not been there before. Thorin opened it and found an oddly shaped package wrapped in paper.

"Long live the king," the paper said.

Thorin unwrapped the package revealing a shining white jewel.

"The Arkenstone," he said in quiet awe.

Frerin sat up from where he had been sleeping and ruffled his hair. "Thorin what... oh."

"It's the Arkenstone and all you can say is oh?" Thorin said.

"Well... give me a few minutes to wake up and then I shall be more eloquent." Frerin slapped Thorin on the back.

"Long live the king."

Thorin smiled and slapped Frerin on the back as well.

"Long live us all, brother." He gently tapped Dis with his

foot. "Sister, we found it."

"Unless it's a soft pillow, I'm not interested," Dis grumbled.

"It's the Arkenstone," Thorin said.

"Hmm... very nice. Long live the king. Happy for you. Shut up and go to sleep," Dis said.

Thorin laughed. *Let it never be said that siblings could not humble even the proudest of kings.*

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Before I am asked... *whips out research from *The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England*, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Elizabethan England*, and *The Tudor Housewife** Ale was often made at home by housewives and widows. It was considered an honorable profession among women. Bella would know how to make such from her mother if we are to assume that the Shire is based on a mixture of medieval-Victorian England. How she got the materials (grains and such) will be explained later on.

Chapter IV: Cleansing and Slumber

Chapter Summary

Bella continues trying to be a good host. The Dwarves are still confused, though Gandalf seems to know a bit more.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art.... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival. — From *The Four Loves* by C. S. Lewis

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

“We should see how the rest of the Mountain has been repaired,” Thorin said at breakfast the next day.

“And find the burglar,” Nori said.

“Host,” Gandalf corrected.

“He stole my hat!” Bofur protested.

“Would you have gone into the treasury otherwise?” Gandalf asked.

“No,” Bofur said, “It still doesn’t excuse the theft of my hat!”

“You really should talk to someone about your hat obsession,” Dori said.

“Not all of us can have as lovely hair as the Ri brothers,” Bofur said, “Besides, it’s a nice hat. Very warm. Quite cozy too.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella was surprised by how easy it was to enter the treasury once the Arkenstone had been found. Two of the Dwarves (Bifur and Dori) were guarding the doorstep, but paid little attention to the treasure room itself save to admire the gold. It was a simple matter to avoid them and pick up some more jewels and coins for her next step of being a good host.

After collecting her materials, she almost ran into the rest of Company of Thorin Oakenshield. She dodged them and hid in an alcove. As they passed, she got a closer look at them than she had before save for when she had stolen Bofur’s hat. She put a hand over her mouth as she tried to cover her gasp. Oakenshield’s sword had a dragon tooth in the handle.

A dragon slayer’s sword.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin and those of the Company who had been to breakfast (sans Bombur and Óin who remained to guard the kitchen) returned to the treasury to look through the weapons to see if there was anything useful. Bofur handed breakfast to Bifur and Dori before returning to the stock pile of weapons.

It was not as well tended as some of the other treasure. The organization seen throughout the treasury was still applied to the weapons, but they seemed an afterthought and left in a corner. Some were no longer sharp and those

not made of finer Dwarf materials did not shine as they ought.

"I suppose Smaug had no need of these," Dwalin said.

"Or our host does not like them," Gandalf said.

"Why do you say that?" Kíli said as he picked up a bow with silver engravings.

"An educated guess," Gandalf said.

"Do you know who the burglar is?" Thorin said.

"I have a strong suspicion, but it may just be an old man's foolish hope," Gandalf said.

"Thorin! You'll want to see this!" Balin said.

The King hurried over to his adviser who held up a chainmail shirt of mithril. "How... what? It's beautiful. Look at the craftsmanship," Thorin said.

"Is that mithril?" Frerin said. He gently touched the side of one of the arms of the shirt. "It is!"

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella watched as all of the Dwarves gathered around Balin as he held up the chainmail shirt. If she had not read the history of the Dwarves, she would have been quite confused by all the fuss over some light metal. Instead, she remembered once calculating the value of the chain mail out of curiosity and fainted when she realized it was worth more than the Shire. Now, it was intriguing but useless to her.

Some very small part of Bella warmed at such eagerness in the Dwarves. It reminded her of fairs where Hobbits would comment over a particularly precious pumpkin or a beautiful bit from a ball of yarn. Dwarves were dedicated to their crafts and loved well-made things. Of character traits, those were not bad ones.

"It's too small for any of us," Dori said.

"We could resize it using the links from the arms and make it a vest," Frerin said.

"Or melt it down and make plate armor," Dwalin said.

"At the moment, we will do neither. If we find nothing else like it, we shall discuss it further. As of now... it would be a shame to undo such work," Thorin said. He took the shirt and laid it out on a chest. "We should move out of here quickly."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Fíli hid another dagger in his clothing. (He did not want to be outdone by his Uncle Frerin.) The knife was a beautiful piece of work with gold and rubies. The tales he had been told as a child had undersold the obscenity of wealth in Erebor. Everything was...

Something small and hard hit Fíli in the head. "Kíli," Fíli growled.

"What?" Kíli said as he looked up from the arrows he held.

"What did you throw at me?" Fíli said.

"I didn't throw anything!" Kíli said.

“Listen, we don’t have time for games,” Fíli said.

Kíli huffed. “I’m not playing any...”

An aquamarine the size of a gold coin hit Kíli in the head.

“ORI!” the brothers shouted.

“I’m right next to you, no need to shout!” Ori said.

Fíli and Kíli took a moment to guess the trajectory of the gems before both being hit with sapphires. “BURGLAR!” they shouted at the same time.

The two brothers ran up to the entrance of the treasury and stepped on gems once they entered the general area of Erebor. “Another trail!” Kíli said.

“YOU TWO MORONS!” Dis shouted.

Fíli and Kíli would have slunk back to their mother and waited for assistance until they realized the two morons were their uncles. “Come on, we need to find where the burglar is leading us,” Thorin said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Besides the four guards, the Dwarves and the wizard followed the trail of gems and gold coins up several flights of stairs, three more than the dining room. They were at one of the garrisons. A pile of gold in the same pyramid shape as the day before was in front of the door. Bofur and Nori explored the place and came back grinning.

“You’ve got to see this,” Bofur said with one of his big grins.

The garrison had been thoroughly cleaned and dusted. There was a light scent of soap and mothballs. As they moved through the barracks, they found more jewels and coins which matched some of the colors the Company wore on top of beds with blankets and pillows. Blue sapphires and silver coins had been placed outside of a captain's room, the only sleeping quarters with privacy. At the very back was a steaming communal bath with a soap bar and a towel for each of the Company. None of the taps could run hot water, so it had to have been warmed by the fire and brought in by hand. There was also a half-dozen bottles lined up on a shelf.

Óin opened and sniffed one of the bottles. "Lavender, to lift the spirits and ease the mind and stomach."

"We found this on the door with the sapphires and silver," Nori said as he handed an envelope to Thorin. The thief winked. "Don't worry. We didn't read it."

Dear Mr. Oakenshield,

I am terribly sorry that I was so suspicious of you and your Company. I did not wish to be a host to thieves when the real owners could come back at any time. I shall do my best to make up for my poor hosting abilities in our earlier acquaintance.

I hope you found the Arkenstone intact and to your liking. After the demise of the dragon, I removed it from the hoard in case thieves ever came to claim it. I have read the histories and know of its importance.

As you are now King Under the Mountain, I thought some bedding and a hot bath would do wonders for your weary Dwarves and wizard. All of Erebor is yours, sir.

In the library that is three levels above the main gate, you will find an account of anything I have taken. All gold and jewels taken from the walls are to be found in the treasury.

Enjoy your reprieve, Mr. Oakenshield.

Sincerely,

Underhill

"A library," Ori said dreamily.

"One of them. That one was general documents open to the public. There are government documents and chronicles that required permission found just a level below us," Balin said.

"If I remember correctly, the library Underhill mentioned had plenty of natural light," Gandalf said.

"I would like to pretend I could capture sunlight in my hand when lessons bored me there," Dis said quietly. She had crouched next to the large bath and tested out its warmth with her hand. "Oh, Thorin, if I could have hot baths, good food, and a soft bed, I may give you part of my share of the treasure."

"I'd sell your boys for a hot bath. It's not like they would use it. Doubt any bath could stop their stench. Almost... Elvish," Frerin said before he was shoved into the bath by Fíli and Kíli, weapons and all.

"Boys, you're mucking up the bath water and his weapons will rust," Dis said.

"I could have drowned! Been eaten by a sea monster!" Frerin said as he crawled out of the pool.

“Any sea monsters would be too terrified of the sight of you,” Dwalin muttered.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin and Dwalin spoke quietly at the entrance of the garrison while some of the Company bathed. Glóin and Dis went to relieve Bombur and Óin from their duties. Fíli and Kíli did the same for Bifur and Dori.

“Yet another place to guard,” Thorin said.

“We are being spread out and we haven’t even reached the front gate yet,” Dwalin said.

“Is the burglar waiting to strike us in small numbers?” Thorin said.

“Possibly. Why has he not shown himself yet? The only thing I can think of is that he is hiding something or waiting to kill us,” Dwalin said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella watched Dwalin and Thorin from her perch hidden in the shadows. She had become more and more interested in the going-ons of her... the Dwarves. (*Destroy such thoughts, Bella. Nothing good came from possessiveness.*)

The Company seemed to be made up of family units and close friendships. If the names were similar, the Dwarves were most likely related in some way or another. The Dwalin and Ori friendship was odd, but sweet. It made more sense when Bella realized Balin (a more confident and older version of Ori) was Dwalin’s older brother. Nori and Bofur always had a joke at the ready. Dis and Dori seemed to be the designated worriers of the group.

Thorin and Dwalin were far more amusing to watch out of all of them. A raised eyebrow or a slow blink seemed to be all it took to get a message across between the two. They were in-sync with each other and seemed to be always aware of the other's presence. It was also maddening because she could not understand what they were saying at the moment, even if it was in Westron.

Ori came out of the garrison. "Excuse me, Balin wishes to speak with the both of you. I'll keep watch. Nori will be out in a moment."

Dwalin and Thorin gave their thanks to the young Dwarf and went inside. Ori took out knitting needles and continued working on a project with rough yarn. He smiled contentedly and looked up occasionally. He seemed to not be worried about the "burglar" as the Company called Bella. Nori came out sometime later, shaking his head.

"You deserve better materials to work with brother," Nori said.

"It would be nice, but it will be awhile before we can trade properly," Ori said. He smiled gently. "Besides, this will make an excellent dishcloth."

Bella moved away from the garrison. None of her Dwarves would be without if she could provide for them.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

A few hours later, Ori had a small satchel thrown at his feet. "Burglar!" Nori growled as he ran towards where the projectile had been thrown.

The rest of the Dwarves ran out and were going to pull their weapons when Ori shouted, "Wait!"

Nori ran back. "Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm not. The burglar is long gone and you know it!" Ori said.

"Then what is the matter?" Dori said.

"Look!" Ori pulled out of the bag three balls of yarn, two of different shade of purple and the third grey.

Dori and Nori eagerly examined the yarn. "Finely made," Dori said.

"Cashmere, wouldn't you say?" Nori asked.

"Most likely. An excellent dye job," Dori said, "Even coloring. Lovely work. Not the best I've seen, but good work."

"Why though?" Frerin said.

"Because, Thrainson," Gandalf said as he took out his pipe with a smirk, "Ori mentioned his desire to knit something nicer than rough wool."

"It's a gift?" Ori said.

"I would assume so. This is good. Very good. The Guardian wants you to be happy. Someone who wanted you dead would not care about such things," Gandalf said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

As the days continued, more presents were delivered mysteriously to the Dwarves. There were enough whetstones so that each Dwarf (and Gandalf) had one. A squash had been delivered with Bifur's name lightly etched into it. More blankets were brought a few hours after Óin

had muttered about the nights being too cold for people to remain well. The fiddle that Dis had as a child appeared wrapped in one of her childhood blankets after she had told Fíli and Kíli stories from when she was a young Dwarf. When the food had almost run out, a week's worth of food was found in the level above the garrison.

Though the Dwarves continued their search for the burglar, they tended other matters. The gate was the only area of Erebor not repaired with craftsmanship they had seen in the rest of Erebor. Smaug had merely piled boulders in the gaping hole. The doors lay shattered on the ground and great cracks crept along the archway.

After they had built a temporary wall until they could receive enough craftsmen to repair the gate properly, the Dwarves explored the treasury. It was well organized. Items that the children of Thráin and the sons of Fundin remembered were quickly found from Thorin's golden harp (magical and still in tune) to beads belonging to Thrór's wife.

Thorin spent limited time in the treasury. He went on long walks around Erebor with at least one of the Company, though Balin and Dwalin he spent the most time with. On one of these walks with Dwalin, Thorin said, "We need to draw the burglar out."

"How?" Dwalin asked.

"We need a reason for it to come to us again," Thorin said.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Dun dun DUNNN!!!

Chapter V: Vulnerable

Chapter Summary

Oin needs some tea and some things cannot be avoided.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. — From *The Four Loves* by C.S. Lewis

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Something was wrong with Bella's Dwarves.

Actually, it was just the one Dwarf, but it made the other Dwarves irritated so Bella considered all of her Dwarves under duress.

Thorin had not slept in two days. He paced the treasury and seemed to be attempting an inventory of all the gold. The king snapped at anyone who tried to interrupt him. Frerin, Dis, and Balin seemed to be in constant conference over the change in Thorin's behavior.

“Do you think it’s... it’s what Grandfather had?” Frerin said.

“I don’t know,” Dis said.

“He’s going to make himself ill if he doesn’t sleep,” Balin said.

“Let him,” Dis said harshly, “Then we can drag him out of here and hope that he doesn’t... doesn’t have...” The Dwarf became overcome with emotion. Frerin passed a handkerchief. “Thank you. I just can’t bear to see him like this.”

Bella moved so she could hug her knees and remain unseen. She knew of gold sickness from records both official and unofficial throughout Erebor. King Thrór had been in the midst of it when the dragon had come. She wondered if such things happened quickly as she thought Thorin had resisted it quite well so far.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Another day passed in such a manner. Gandalf could be found in the upper library, muttering to himself over scrolls. Bella considered going to Gandalf then as it was only him and Ori in the library. They would find her journals eventually, even if they were hidden in an alcove behind a bookcase. She resisted going to him, despite being a few yards away in a secret passage.

He won’t know who you are. He’s a wizard. He’ll see your scales and demand you tell him where the dragon is. He’ll do terrible things to you if you don’t.

Bella covered her ears as if that could block the voices in her head. *Shut up. Shut up. You don’t know that. Wizards*

are good if irritable. Gandalf always cared for me.

No one has ever cared for you.

Bella hissed at the all-to-familiar voice of Smaug. *You're dead. You can't hurt me anymore. GO AWAY YOU MONSTER!*

The memory of Smaug laughed at her. ***No one will help you. You are worthless. No one will save you. Just give up now.***

Bella ran down the passage and made her way to the treasury. *You are dead, worm. You can't hurt me anymore. You are full of lies. My parents loved me. My friends loved me. I AM NOT WORTHLESS YOU OVERGROWN LIZARD!*

The Hobbit slammed into a wall and fell to the ground. She did not bother getting up. "I won't let you destroy me," Bella whispered, "I won't let you have that."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

When Bella finally made it to the treasury, it was to find Óin kneeling over a fallen Thorin. She listened as best as she could to what had happened. Thorin had passed out after several days of not sleeping and limited meals. There was a fear that it was due to gold sickness.

"What I would give for some valerian or chamomile. It may calm him when he wakes," Óin said.

Bella smiled. She had both of those plants in her medical supplies. The Hobbit had a pleasant tea for anxiety and stress (which she had used far more than she had wished to over the years). Bella ran to fetch it from her kitchen.

As she made her way to the other side of the mountain, the voice came back. *Why bother? They'll all just die anyway. Only weak creatures would fall to gold sickness.*

He is sick. How can I not help?

Easily. Don't you remember your pets? Even if Smaug did not find them, they would die from old age decades before you could ever hope to die.

Mr. Oakenshield is not a bird or a rat. He is a person.

*That just makes it worse. They have **feelings** and **thoughts** and **ideas**. People can hurt you in ways you could never imagine.*

Bella had no response.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Company had settled in the treasury while Bella had been gone. Gandalf had taken residence out on the doorstep saying he needed air. Frerin and Dis had been put on watch of the dining room. The garrison was left unguarded.

Bella waited until the Dwarves had settled before entering the treasury. Thorin was by the door and no one was near him. Bella thought it odd, but ignored the nagging feeling she had.

She crouched next to Thorin and took stock of his condition. His breathing was deep, a good sign. He was paler than usual, which was a bad sign. She noted his armor had been cast aside as well as his dragon slayer sword.

Bella put down a tea pot and the package of herbs she had brought. As she arranged things so that the message would be obvious, cold metal was placed against Bella's neck. "So, this is our burglar," Thorin said.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: The chapter everyone has been waiting for!

Chapter VI: The Burglar

Chapter Summary

In which Thorin catches the Burglar (though Bella is not a burglar).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on. — Robert Frost

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin has his sword at the intruder's throat. He could not see the burglar's face, but he could see a long golden braid that brushed against the floor as the burglar crouched by a tea pot.

"So, this is the burglar," Thorin said.

The rest of the Dwarves drew their weapons and surrounded the intruder. There were several noises of surprise as the torches were brought close.

"I think it's a girl!" Kili said.

"What's wrong with its feet though?" Fili asked.

"There is nothing wrong with my feet you soft-footed cretins," the burglar said. Her voice confirmed that she was female. "And I am not a burglar. I have not stolen anything."

“Then what are you doing in the treasury? Trying to assassinate the king?” Dwalin said.

“No! I had some tea and I thought it might ease him,” the burglar said. She glanced back at Thorin, her face obscured by the shadows cast by the torches. “Obviously, he is not ill.”

“Obviously,” Thorin said dryly.

She knelt to the ground and placed her hands on her lap, her eyes downcast. “Well, get on with it.”

“Get on with what?” Bofur said.

“Killing me,” she said with a shrug.

“Not yet,” Thorin said as he got to his feet, “We have questions first. As soon as the wizard arrives, we will decide what to do with you.”

The woman sighed. “Fine then. It’s just putting off the inevitable.”

Thorin made his way around to face the burglar. The first thing he noticed was that she had a splattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks. The next thing he noticed was the gold scales embedded in the skin from her cheeks to the edge of her ears.

“Kili, get my siblings,” Thorin said.

“Yes, uncle,” Kili said as he ran off to the dining room.

The woman looked up at Thorin with golden eyes the same color as her hair and scales. “Something the matter, Mr. Oakenshield?”

"A burglar is a matter to be dealt with, yes," Thorin said.

"I am not a burglar," the woman said.

"So you keep saying," Thorin said.

The two continued staring at each other. Thorin realized he had unintentionally entered a staring contest and he had a sneaking suspicion he was going to lose when Gandalf came near.

"You found our host," Gandalf said.

"We found our burglar," Nori said.

"I doubt... that," Gandalf paused as he caught sight of the woman kneeling before him. "You are not quite what I expected."

"And what did you expect? A Dwarf?" the woman asked. She tucked behind her ear a small braid clasped with a bead made of silver and sapphires. Anger rose in Thorin that a non-Dwarf would decorate herself thus.

"No. I was expecting a Hobbit, but you do not quite look like how she would have looked," Gandalf said.

She glared at the wizard, but said nothing.

"What is your name, Mistress Hobbit?" Gandalf asked.

"I will not give my name to you or anyone else," the Hobbit said.

"No, that would be unwise, but I will hazard a guess if you will allow me," Gandalf said.

She shrugged. "It doesn't matter. I am going to die sooner or later. Take however much time you like."

"Do put away your weapons," Gandalf said as he slowly sat on the floor, "It is scaring her."

"I'm not scared," the woman said.

"So you say," Gandalf said, "Now, Mistress Hobbit, how long have you been living in Erebor?"

"Longer than any Dwarf here," she said.

"Hmmm. You gave us the food, did you not?" Gandalf said.

"What do you think?" she said.

"It's not often that Halflings leave the Shire and never this far," Balin said.

The woman's mouth snapped shut.

Gandalf continued his questioning. "Why did you help us?"

"Because I could." She shifted uncomfortably, but remained kneeling.

"Just like you could build the memorials?"

She looked away and to the side where Thorin had slept.

"What makes you think I built those?"

Gandalf spoke softly. "You know, Hobbits are extraordinary creatures. They need almost no outside help when it comes to living and thriving. It took me several centuries to figure out how they could be such good builders and farmers. Nothing extravagant like these halls, mind you, but

comfortable from the poorest Hobbit to the richest one. Everyone was fed and sheltered.”

“Maybe it is because we have no care for gold,” the burglar said.

“That is part of it, certainly,” Gandalf said, “But no, you know of what I speak of: Hobbit Crafts.”

The burglar snickered. “We make some fine doilies.”

“That is not what I am referring to and you know it, young lady,” Gandalf said.

She glared. “I’m hardly young.”

“Compared to me you are a child. I remember when Hobbits still wandered, Mistress Hobbit,” Gandalf said, “I refer to Hobbits and their ability to manipulate the gifts of the earth, including stone. You repaired Erebor, didn’t you?”

The burglar continued averting her gaze from Gandalf.

He sighed and set aside his staff. “I am going to tell you a story and you will confirm whether it is true or not.”

“I could lie,” she said.

“You won’t,” Gandalf said. His voice deepened and the torches dimmed for a moment.

She bit her lip and looked back at the wizard.

Gandalf spoke softly again. “In a hole in the ground there lived a Hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a

Hobbit hole, and that means comfort. In this Hobbit hole lived the daughter of two friends of mine. She loved adventures and stories of great deeds, but also home, friends, and family. One day, a dragon descended upon the Shire. None could fight it. Few even understood what was happening save that they were being attacked. The Hobbit I spoke of... she gave herself to the dragon to save her home. She could not watch her loved ones die, could she?"

The burglar began to shake.

"And she saw a great many terrible things, didn't she? Things that should never happen and things that no one should witness. She was kept by the dragon and was alone for nearly two centuries."

The Hobbit's lip began to bleed from how hard she bit it.

"And the Hobbit was hurt by the dragon and it changed her. Made her something she was scared of. So, she hid even when there were those who could help her. She would rather die than become the thing she hated."

"Stop it! Shut up! You can't know that!" the Hobbit said.

"I can, daughter of Bungo Baggins and Belladonna Took-Baggins," Gandalf said.

The Hobbit gasped and covered her mouth. "You can't be... you shouldn't be alive. Everyone I know is dead."

"I am not everyone, Belladonna Baggins," Gandalf said.

She began to cry. "No one... no one's said... no one's said my name..."

“You’re a clever Hobbit, aren’t you Bella?” Gandalf said, “You knew that you couldn’t tell your name to Smaug.”

“He tried... he kept trying. I wouldn’t. It wasn’t his. I wouldn’t give it to him,” Bella sobbed, “Is it... is it still there? Is it still there? Can you prove it? Had he been lying to me all these years?”

Gandalf pulled dried leaves from the pouch on his belt. “I was saving this for when the Dwarves reclaimed their home. I think it will be put to better use if you had it.”

Bella winced when their hands touched. She looked at the leaves and with shaking hands smelled them. “Old... Old Toby? It’s... the Shire?”

“Yes, the Shire is whole, Bella. I heard the tale from your friend, Lobelia. She had a son named Lotho,” Gandalf said.

The Hobbit sobbed and sobbed. The Dwarves looked at Gandalf who had tears in his eyes. “Yes, Bella, everyone lived because of you.”

Bofur pulled out a dingy piece of cloth from his pocket. “Here, lass.”

Bella took the make-shift handkerchief and covered her face with it. “I’m so sorry I stole your hat,” she said.

“No harm done, lass,” Bofur said. He tried to put a hand on her, but she flinched from the touch.

Dwalin shuffled over to his bedroll and pulled out his spare cloak. He draped it over the sobbing Hobbit. “Looks like she going into shock like some warriors after battle.”

“That is an apt description, Master Dwarf,” Gandalf said, “Bella, may I put a hand on your shoulder?”

She moved closer to the wizard and threw her arms around him. “They all lived, Gandalf?”

“Yes, they did,” Gandalf said as he gently patted her shoulder and back.

“I’m so sorry,” she said.

“It’s alright,” Gandalf said.

Bella kept saying she was sorry over and over again as she tried to stop crying. The Dwarves gave space as much as they could while they waited for the sobbing woman to regain herself.

“The dragon took her then,” Dwalin said to Thorin.

“It sounds like she has been a prisoner since before the Fall of Erebor,” Thorin said. He covered his mouth. “If what Gandalf says is correct, she has been left alone with the worm for 171 years at least.”

“Poor lass,” Dwalin said, “She’s been hurt over those years. She’s scared of us.”

“That’s why she hasn’t shown herself. Burglar? More like a child,” Thorin said.

Kili, Frerin, and Dis slid down a pile of gold. “Found the burglar?” Frerin said.

“I am not a burglar,” Bella sniffled.

“We found our host,” Gandalf said.

Dis and Frerin stood by Thorin. "Why did you call us?" Dis asked.

"I believe I found your golden savior," Thorin said.

"You're joking!" Dis said.

"That is a physical impossibility for Thorin," Frerin said because being cuffed behind the head by his brother.

Bella turned around and glared at Thorin. "We don't hit people. It's cruel."

"He's not hitting me and besides, I could beat him any day," Frerin said.

She dabbed her eyes again and slumped where she sat. "What golden savior?"

"She hasn't aged a day," Dis said.

"She has fewer scales. Just a bit on the face, but yes, it's her," Frerin said.

"Who are you talking about? I've never met you two before," Bella said.

"Well, we would have been smaller. Just children, really. We were there when the dragon came to Erebor," Frerin said. He and Dis knelt down. "You see, I was looking for Dis, then the pillar fell and you showed up."

"Yes, you gave us a scale each," Dis said. She pulled out a necklace that held the dragon scale. "Not only did you save us, I gave this to my husband before a battle and he lived when he was struck with an arrow because it hit this instead of his skin."

“Yes, and I survived when a spear struck my scale during another battle,” Frerin said.

Dis continued, “So what we’re trying to say is...”

“... that thanks to you...”

“... we’re alive.”

Bella was silent for a long moment. “The smaller child was a girl.”

Dis huffed. “I am a female! Isn’t it obvious?”

Bella tilted her head. “No.”

Dis sighed. “Honestly, how do races outside of Dwarves not see the difference?” She grabbed Bella’s hand and put it on her chest.

“Oh! Well...” Bella pulled her hand away. “Pardon me. I am so sorry. That was quite rude of me.”

“At least you haven’t mistaken me for my brother,” Dis said as she glared at Gandalf.

“I did not see your face,” Gandalf said gruffly.

“Uh huh...” Dis said.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t do more,” Bella said. She bit her lip but winced at the cut she had made.

“Did someone punch you? It was Thorin, wasn’t it? He punches first and asks questions later,” Dis said.

“I did not touch her,” Thorin growled.

"I know, but you gave Grandfather a black eye once when he woke you up when you fell asleep studying," Dis said.

"You were *four* when that happened," Thorin said.

Dis pulled Bella to her feet. "Ignore him. He's an overprotective softie. Come on. Let's have some tea."

"I have some here," Bella mumbled.

"We need a bit more space and a little less gold. Not very cozy, is it?" Dis said, "And give the poor woman some breathing space! If I had a gaggle of men hovering over me with no explanation, I would be sobbing too. Don't worry. They'll never lay a hand on you now that they know you won't assassinate their king. They are a bunch of softies."

"Which of them are?" Bella asked.

Dis laughed. "All of them."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: They are a bunch of softies pretending to be scary.

Chapter VII: The Hobbit

Chapter Summary

In which things are explained and Thorin is paranoid.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I survived because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me. - Joshua Graham

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella found herself listening to Dis' pleasant chatter about her brothers, sons, and the rest of the Company of Thorin Oakenshield. As they made their way up to the kitchen, Bella held back more tears as she realized she had not spoken to another woman outside of her secretive business transactions in Laketown since Lobelia.

Dis put Bella at the right of the head of the table. The Hobbit protested before being sent what Bella knew to be a mother's "Look". Bella sat meekly as Dis and then Bombur were busy in the kitchen.

Gandalf sat next to Bella on her right while Thorin sat at the head of the table. The Company filtered in and looked at their host with curiosity but not animosity. They left the seat to Thorin's left empty for Dis.

Fíli, Kíli, and Ori looked ready to burst from questions, but several dark looks were cast at them from the rest of the Company.

Bella found her voice. "I'm not contagious. This is from... Smaug. Dragons are not always careful so they need to make sure they do not set fire to the servants they occasionally take."

"So it is actual dragon scales?" Ori said.

"Yes. They shed like snakes do. I can't get rid of them on my own beyond a few layers. I've tried... a variety of ways to remove them," Bella said. She waved her hand. "Not proper at a dining table. I am glad they are disappearing on their own."

"So, you're a Hobbit?" Fili said.

Bella nodded. "Yes, I'm a Hobbit. I would guess that Dwarves from Erud Luin might have had dealings with Hobbits. The Shire is near there."

"How do you know of Erud Luin?" Kili said.

Bella motioned to the table and the pantry. "I could not grow enough of my own food in what bit of land I could save. I was permitted to trade with the Men of Laketown. Well, that's not true. I could steal from them at first, but then I was able to work enough back I could repay them with interest." Dis set a mug of tea before Bella. "Thank you. I suppose in that way I am a thief."

"Thieves don't give things back," Nori mumbled.

"Ah, Master Thief, I have wondered about you," Bella said, a smile beginning to form on her face.

"Me? What d'ya want to know about me?" Nori said.

“How did *you* end up on this quest? In fact, all of you. Why are you all here? I understand Mr. Oakenshield, his siblings, and his nephews, even the sons of Fundin, but what of the rest of you lot?” Bella said.

“Why do you want to know about us?” Bofur said.

“Why wouldn’t I? Those who reclaimed Erebor. The Company of Thorin Oakenshield. *The Lord of Silver Fountains, the King of Carven Stone, the King Beneath the Mountain, shall come into his own.*” Bella mimicked a trumpet noise before laughing. She paused and knit her fingers together, her thumbs tapped against each other. “I haven’t... done much polite talk in a long time and I don’t remember how to do it properly. I apologize.”

“You still have better manners than Dwalin,” Frerin said.

“Like you’re one to talk. I didn’t start a belching contest on Durin’s Day,” Dwalin said.

“I was twenty!” Frerin said.

Dis covered her mouth as she hid a smile. Dwalin and Frerin entered an argument about various social blunders they had intentionally or unintentionally committed over the years. Balin occasionally threw in a comment here and there. When the older dwarf winked at Bella, she realized Balin was allowing it to continue to keep Bella at ease.

Almost without thinking, Bella got up and started pouring more tea as the Dwarves ran out. She wished there was more food, but she knew they were going to be out within a few weeks. Not that she could do much with what they had. Milk and eggs were limited due to the small size of her goat herd and chicken flock. Meat was in short supply since she

could not reasonably keep up enough animals to feed herself more than once a month if fresh.

“Miss Baggins, sit down. You’re making me nervous,” Dis said.

“Oh, sorry,” Bella said. She sat down again and smoothed her trousers. “Um... terrible rude of me. I’m not in charge here. I suppose it would be better if I answered questions first.”

“I have a question!” Kíli said.

“Yes, Mr. Kíli?” Bella said. She placed a hand over her stomach in a vain attempt to settle her nerves.

“Why are your feet so odd?” Kíli asked. The young Dwarf was smacked by several other members of the Company.

“Well, why do you hide your feet in boots?” Bella said. She smiled. “Please stop smacking him. He seems barely more than a tween.”

“He’s old enough for the quest. He’s old enough to be polite,” Dis grumbled.

“Well, has he met a Hobbit beyond business? I didn’t think so. We Hobbits have feet thicker than leather. The hair keeps our feet warm. We only need boots in the coldest of winters. I saw it happen maybe... once? It had snowed for five days and the snow was taller than most of the hills in the Shire.” Bella covered her mouth as she tried not to laugh. “Poor Hamfast came trudging up the hill to make sure the Baggins family had not been swallowed up by the winter. It was like watching a cat that had stepped in mud.” She rested her head against the table. “Dear Hamfast.”

“Miss Baggins, I do wish to know how a Hobbit ended up on the other side of the world,” Thorin said quietly.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Hobbit twisted the rag Bofur had given her earlier with her hands. “Oh, yes, that. I would be asking that question to if I was in your position.”

Thorin motioned for the Hobbit to continue the tale. There was a flash of anger in Ms. Baggins’ eyes when he did that, but her anxiety returned as she began.

“Well, it’s like Gandalf said, only not so grand. The dragon came to the Shire. We have no wealth like the Dwarves. We only have good land. Sometimes silver cutlery. I think only the heads of the families had silver cutlery. Lobelia was always quite jealous of what those spoons represented, but the dear...” Bella took a deep breath. “Anyway, I showed him my talent and he decided to keep me.” She motioned to the scales on her face and neck. “The servants of dragons are rather flammable. These appear if I am injured. They fall off eventually.”

“So that’s why you have less scales now than when we saw you,” Dis said.

Bella nodded. “Indeed. That was about a week into being in Smaug’s company.” She placed her hands on the table to steady herself. “I was ordered to clean and repair Erebor as well as remove any valuable objects from the wall. As long as the...” Her hands clenched into a fist. “... as the refuse did not smell, Smaug did not care how I dealt with his destruction. The tales talk about how dragons are not like the Free Folk, but I did not understand how we are considered like pesky livestock.” She huffed.

“You built the monuments,” Frerin said.

The Hobbit shrugged. “Not at first. I kept a tally and drew the symbols I found on the Dwarves in case the Lonely Mountain was reclaimed and the dead needed to be accounted for. Hobbits are simple folk. We are buried in the earth. Sometimes we place a stone marker, but we prefer to have a tree or our favorite flowers planted over us. As the years passed and I read more about Dwarrow Customs, I made the monuments. At that point I had alphabetized the treasury, so do not place any honor upon it. Merely respectability and boredom working together.”

“Bella, I must ask you this, though it may pain you,” Gandalf said.

“I may decline to answer, then,” Bella said.

The wizard said quietly, “Dragons do not keep servants.”

“I am aware of that,” Bella said.

“How are you still alive, Bella, if that is true?” Gandalf said.

“Well, it’s two or three things. The first was my... knack,” Bella said.

“Knack?” Bofur said.

“It will be easier to show you,” Bella said as she stood. She then walked over to the door and punched straight through it. When she pulled her hand back, her knuckles and forearm were bleeding. She gave a noise of pain before saying, “That’s not the trick.”

Before the Dwarves could assist the obviously mad Hobbit, Bella hissed as she held up her arm. Where once there

were bruises and scratches on her fist and forearm were now scales. "That's a trick Smaug gave. That hurt worse than punching the stupid door."

Thorin shot a glare at Gandalf, but the wizard smiled which was not reassuring at all. Bella gathered up the splinters and placed them against the door.

"Now, you may come as close as you like, but please be silent. I haven't had an audience in many years," Bella said.

Bella did not bother looking back as she heard the Dwarves gather around her. With closed eyes, she cleared her mind of all and then focused on the wood held in her hands. The splinters were eager to become one with the door again. Most things liked to become whole again. Bella sensed that she might be missing one small sliver, but she was certain she could find it in a moment.

When she opened her eyes, the door was nearly repaired. There was a sliver of wood on the ground. "Hold your awe." Bella crouched down, picked up the splinter, and then repaired the door completely. "There. Restored."

Bella turned around and was faced with several Dwarves appraising the door. A few of the Dwarves gently asked her to move. When she did, they became nearly rambunctious as the fifteen Dwarves all crowded around where the hole had been a moment before. They slipped into Khuzdul in their excitement.

Gandalf chuckled. "I do believe they will like you quite a bit."

Bella could feel herself becoming lightheaded both from repairing the door and a horrible possibility she had not

thought of when she showed her craft. "Gandalf, would they..."

"No, dear Hobbit, but they may hire them if you do not tell them otherwise," Gandalf said.

"Good Dwarves? Excuse me," Bella said.

The Dwarves turned and began bombarding Bella with questions and multiple compliments. She placed a hand to cover her eyes as the room spun. "I can't... too many... just... nope."

She fainted.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella dreamed of a crown of gold made with purple gems. It was handed to her by a fierce looking Dwarf. "I thought this might please you. It is your colors and I made it as light as I could."

Before Bella opened her eyes, she heard Óin say, "If you don't give the poor lass some air, I'll stick my staff right up your..."

Bella shoved herself away from the group and ended up sliding under the chairs and the table. She looked out at them, feeling caged.

Everyone was silent as they watched each other. None moved. Bella worried she would have to fight her way out of the room until Frerin said, "She must have been scared of your ugly face, Dwalin."

Dwalin put Frerin in a headlock. "My ugly face? Have you seen yours? You almost have as little of a beard as that dust

Kíli calls facial hair!”

“HEY! IT IS A BEARD!” Kíli said.

“NO IT’S NOT! IT’S STUBBLE!” Fíli said.

“IS TOO A BEARD!”

“IS NOT!”

“IS TOO!”

Frerin continued his argument with Dwalin. “AT LEAST I AM NOT BALD BECAUSE I HAD TO SHAVE OFF MY HAIRSTYLE BECAUSE ORCS LAUGHED AT IT!”

“Can I kill him?” Dwalin asked Thorin.

Thorin had his mouth covered. Based on the shaking of his shoulders, Bella could see that the Dwarf king was laughing.

Dis patted Thorin’s shoulder. “I think what Thorin is trying to say is that you all look ridiculous.”

Bella slowly crept out from under the table and stood next to Gandalf. “They won’t hurt each other?” Bella asked.

Gandalf shook his head. “No. Only some sparring, but they would never hurt each other.”

“Are you quite sure?” Bella said.

“Quite sure, Bella. They might be a bit rougher than Hobbits, but they love fiercely. Are you ready to answer their questions?” Gandalf said.

“As ready as I can be, yes,” Bella said.

“Dwarrow!” Gandalf said. The Company turned their full attention to the wizard. “Miss Baggins has regained consciousness and will now be willing to take your questions in an orderly fashion.”

“Um, can I have some food please? I do not wish to faint again,” Bella said.

Kíli ran to grab some cheese and bread from the kitchen. He handed the food to Bella and said, “Are you sure you’re alright? I mean, we were worried.”

“I will be fine, Mr. Kíli. I just need to eat. I have to eat the normal Hobbit seven meals a day if I am to do work such as I just showed. It takes more energy than a normal days work,” Bella said.

“What did you do to the door?” Balin said.

“I repaired it,” Bella said. She popped a piece of cheese in her mouth and motioned she needed a moment to chew. “I cannot make new materials appear. There must be... an equivalent exchange of materials and energy.”

“So it’s magic,” Ori said.

Bella made a face. “Good gracious, no. We Hobbits have no dealings in magic. Far too messy. It is what Dwarves would call a Craft.”

The Dwarves murmured in understanding.

“What Gandalf does is magic. I have no idea how his fireworks could exist otherwise,” Bella said before taking a bite of bread.

The wizard chuckled. "What I do is not magic either. It only seems that way."

Bella shrugged. "Anyway, what questions do the rest of you have?"

"So how do you do it?" Fíli said.

"Well... I sort of... put it together? See where things belong? A puzzle, if you will." Bella put her unfinished food on the table and moved to the door. "When I broke the door, all of the pieces were there. If there was fire or water, I would have a much rougher time at it. It wouldn't be the door anymore. But something being broken? Simple enough." She tapped the door. "Solid work, Erebor. It took me a century and a half to get the place back in decent shape. I over exerted myself at first." Bella moved away from the Dwarves, lost in her thoughts as she ran her hands over the stone that made up the walls of the room. "Though my knack is mainly that of things that never lived, I did not use it much. Most Hobbits work with living things. With how much energy we have to put into our knack, it is easier to do our mending by hand and cheaper to hire out for someone to repair our shovels and such. I put a lot of myself into repairing these walls."

"So all of those monuments were done over a century and a half?" Frerin said.

Bella shook her head and her mind returned to the present. "Oh, no. I did those last. I focused on the urgent and practical repairs first. I kept track of those who had passed and buried them in stone, but otherwise did not know what to do until I puzzled out Khuzdul." Bella raised her hand to the growing murmurs of disapproval. "I apologize. I was going through the library and most of it was in Khuzdul. I

found some dictionaries in Westron and was able to decipher the texts. How it is pronounced is beyond my skills as I only heard a word or two spoken in my lifetime from the Dwarves of the Blue Mountains. I did not know the language was sacred." She bowed her head and clasped her hands together. "I ask for forgiveness for my transgression against that which is sacred to Dwarrow."

The Dwarves spoke amongst themselves. Thorin said, "You have our pardon as you were the Guardian of Erebor."

Bella laughed and covered her mouth. "Guardian? Hardly. More like the housekeeper. I am, however, grateful."

"So, all Hobbits have such a... knack?" Glóin said.

Bella widened her stance, crossed her arms, and gave a tight smile. "Oh, most of us do. Did you know that Hobbits were not originally from the Shire?"

"No," Glóin said.

"Well, we don't know where we come from. We aren't even sure why we left the place we remember first, but most of us agree that we left because there were interested parties who used Hobbits for their abilities. A lot of the Hobbits were worked until they died from exhaustion and starvation. So, being as we are not made to be fighters, we ran and hid. Now, what I am about to tell you is a bit of a secret, in exchange with my mistake of learning Khuzdul. There is a reason you hear little of the Shire at all, let alone about our crafts. Well, except Gandalf, but we know we can do nothing to a wizard and he has never caused us harm."

"And what's that?" Kíli asked.

Bella put her hands behind her back and gave an innocent smile. "Why, the Big Folk who come bumbling into the Shire never bumble out again." She tilted her head to the side. "Just keep that in mind that if I ever hear of a Dwarf harming Hobbits, well, I am a child of the Shire."

Gandalf put his hand on Bella's shoulder. "Now, you really should not scare the Dwarves that way."

"Why? Everything I said was true," Bella said.

"Yes, but it makes them rather..."

"Show us the dragon," Thorin said.

Bella yipped in surprise. "Excuse me?"

Thorin moved close enough to Bella so she would have to tip her head back to keep eye contact. He continued, "Smaug. You claim he is dead and yet will neither say how he died nor where his corpse is. How do we know you are no longer his servant? Or that you are not under his spell? You may have repaired these halls, but by your own admission it was by orders of Smaug."

"Some, not all," Bella said.

"Where is the dragon, Burglar?" Thorin said.

"He's dead."

"His corpse then."

Bella glanced at Gandalf, but she could tell that the wizard was of a similar mind set. She looked back at Thorin.

"Bring some lights. I put him in the mines."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella took the lead with Balin and Dwalin keeping close watch on the Burglar as well as being able to give a shout of warning to allow the others to run away if there was a dragon. Gandalf was next. Thorin kept Fíli and Kíli behind him while Dis stood at his sword arm and Frerin by his shield arm as they made their way down into the mines. Next was Dori, Nori, and Ori followed by Óin and Glóin. Bifur, Bofur, and Bombur took up the rear.

"How can we know we can trust her?" Dwalin asked in Khuzdul.

"We don't. My only hope is that the wizard is as flammable as we are and that is why he is allowing the Hobbit to do as she does now because she speaks the truth," Thorin replied.

The Hobbit began to whistle a cheery tune that seemed out of place in the silence of the mines.

"Why are you whistling?" Dwalin asked. Thorin could see the suspicion rising in his friend.

"It's a tune that my father taught me to whistle and sing whenever I was scared," Bella said.

"Should we be afraid too?" Dis said as her hand rested on her dagger.

"No. I'm scared of something that does not exist. I'm afraid that Smaug's spirit is somewhere in the mines, waiting for me. I know that ghosts are not real, but I still get shivers up and down my spines if I have to go down here to where the body is," Bella said.

She sang softly, "I whistle a happy tune/And ev'ry single time/The happiness in the tune/Convinces me that I'm not

afraid./Make believe you're brave/And the trick will take you far./You may be as brave/As you make believe you are."

"It is a child's song of the Shire?" Ori asked.

"I suppose. Though my mother always said..." Bella froze mid-step. She whispered, "He's in here."

Gandalf went first, staff lit from a crystal. "This is definitely a dead dragon, but I have never seen Smaug."

Balin went in with Dwalin. The elder son of Fundin said, "Aye, that's him. I would recognize that hide anywhere."

"Be careful with the body," Bella said, still whispering. "I gutted him as best as I could, but I do not think I cleaned everything. Dragon's blood is poison."

Thorin felt ill as he stepped into the cavern. The first thing one noticed with the smell. A live dragon was bad enough; a dead dragon would make even the strongest of stomachs weak. Smaug, desolater of Erebor and Dale, was a caved in corpse. His dragon scales had sunk into the emptiness of his hollowed out insides. His teeth were bare along with some of his bones. The great wings were crinkled and torn. The eye sockets were empty.

"We always thought you exaggerated how big he was," Fíli confessed to his mother and uncles.

"I think you might have made him a bit smaller," Ori said.

"He was bigger alive," Bella croaked. She leaned against the wall by the entrance and looked ready to faint again.

"How did you even get him in here?" Bofur said.

“And why?” Óin added.

“Like I said. Dragons’ blood is poison. I was worried that the blood would poison the water and ground in the land surrounding the mountain. No one lived down here and it is not near the source of the river, so I thought this would be best,” Bella said.

“But you didn’t drag him down here, did you?” Dori said.

“Not as a whole, no,” Bella said. She sunk to the ground and put her head between her knees. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

Óin sat next to the Hobbit and gave her some mint leaves to chew. “You’re a brave lass, killing that dragon on your own.”

Bella snorted. “Do I look like I could have killed Smaug?”

“Well who else could have done it?” Dwalin said.

“I told you, he died. No hand of any Free Folk killed him. Certainly not a Hobbit. In the Shire, swords are mostly blunt, axes are used for trees, and shields as cradles or dish-covers. I am no warrior and certainly no Hobbit is a dragon slayer,” Bella said.

“Your Mother had a shield, did she not?” Gandalf said.

“Yes. I did sleep in it as a babe when she needed me nearby while she weeded the family garden,” Bella said.

Thorin moved towards the Hobbit. “Your word has so far proved true, Burglar.”

Bella looked up at the Dwarf king. "Now why would I ever lie to you?"

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

As they walked back to the garrison, Bella spoke quietly to the wizard. "Gandalf, I have to tell you something," Bella said.

"What is it?" Gandalf asked.

"It has to be private and... and I need your help," Bella said.

"I shall do my best," Gandalf said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

They sat on a bench across the street from the garrison. After she finished her tale, Bella said, "I don't want to die like that, Gandalf. I want to be myself and not let Smaug have me at the end of all of this."

The wizard's voice was weary as he spoke. "Bella, I cannot promise you will live through..."

"I am not asking to live. I'm asking to die as myself."

Gandalf took a deep breath before saying, "I will speak to those who will know more than me about such things."

"Thank you old friend," Bella said.

The wizard stood and put back on his hat. "I will leave in the morning. There is much to do, but little time to do it in."

"What? I thought I could go..."

Gandalf shook his head. "From what I can understand of the magic Smaug made, the curse is connected to the ground as well. If we moved you too far, I fear for what the consequences would be."

"Consequences? Like it would hurt people?"

"Yes."

Bella nodded. "I don't want that to happen."

"I know," Gandalf said. He put his hand on Bella's shoulder lightly. "These are good Dwarves I am leaving you with. It may take some time to get used to them, but I know that you will make yourself welcome to them."

Bella sighed. "Thank you, Gandalf. I wish you safe travels. Farewell."

"Farewell. Until our next meeting," Gandalf said.

A few moments after the wizard walked away, Bofur came around the corner near the bench. "Are you alright, lass?"

"Oh, Mr. Bofur, I am quite well. Are you? You aren't feeling sick, are you?" Bella said.

"No, I'm fine, lass. Just stretching my legs a bit," Bofur said.

"Ah, I may do the same," Bella said as she stood.

"Miss Baggins... I heard a bit of that conversation with the wizard you had. Not much. I just know that... are you really going to die?"

Bella put her hands behind her back to hide her fidgeting. "I might, just as we all might at any moment. The wizard is

simply finding out if what will kill me is preventable.” She smiled. “Now, Mr. Bofur, I thank you for your concern, but save for Mr. Oakenshield, I do not think anyone else will need to know. If your conscience says otherwise, I will not stop you. My only request is that you do not treat me any differently than before.”

“Of course, Miss Baggins!” Bofur said. He made a brief bow. “Bofur, at your service ma’am.”

Bella bowed her head as she was in trousers. “Bella Baggins at yours.”

“I do have a piece of advice for you,” Bofur said.

“Yes?” Bella said.

“Oakenshield isn’t the king’s last name. It’s a title. It would be Mr. Thorin if he weren’t king.”

“I know.”

“You know?”

Bella smirked. “I am aware of such. I merely am... testing something for the ease of my own mind.”

Bofur scratched behind his ear. “I don’t see what it does to make you more comfortable, but as long as you know what you’re doing, I’ll leave you be.”

Bella’s smirk turned into a smile. “Alright then. I’m exhausted. I think it’s time to sleep before I give the full tour tomorrow.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin sat with the wizard in the small captain's room of the garrison as Gandalf told an obviously abbreviated version of the curse laid on Bella Baggins. "Can you not tell me what ails the Hobbit that means you must leave us so suddenly?"

"It is from her time spent with Smaug and this curse will not be passed on to any other who passes through these halls," Gandalf said.

"Why not speak with us outright about it? There are many tales in Erebor's libraries about dragons and..."

"Of which she has read all."

Thorin continued speaking. "...there are other Dwarven libraries such as my cousin Dain's..."

"Which are not as well stocked as Erebor's."

Thorin gritted his teeth. "... and somehow you don't know how to fix this?"

"It is not a great feat to know more than you, Thorin Oakenshield," Gandalf said tersely, "However, there is much I do not know, including how to stop this curse. There are others in my order who might have an answer, both of whom I can reach before the Mortal Men's New Year."

"Why such secrecy from the Company? What are you not telling me, Gandalf?"

The wizard sighed. "I have never fully understood Hobbits. You can learn all that there is to know about them in a month and yet in a hundred years they can still surprise you. What I do know is that just like all other Free Folk, they do not want pity. Love is what they desire most. Bella

has gone without love for 171 years. The only good news in this wretchedness is that Hobbits heal better than any other race I have ever come across. Her scars will always run deep, but she is resilient. My goal in this quest is to keep her from having one last scar before her life ends even if I cannot save her from this curse.”

The two fell silent. They could hear the Company getting ready for sleep. A few questions were given to the Hobbit before Bifur told the younger Dwarves to be silent.

The king spoke first. “We know of wounds of the heart and soul. My Dwarves will not harm her purposefully. Fíli, Kíli, and Ori are too enthusiastic, but I shall tell them to let the Hobbit breathe. I cannot guarantee her safety from outside forces.”

“Understood.”

Thorin tightened his hands into a fist as he kept his voice steady. “Nor will I be responsible for her fate.”

Gandalf nodded. Sorrow weighed on his shoulders.
“Agreed.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin watched the Hobbit as she slept next to Dis. He had much to think over. Gandalf was leaving on “wizard’s business” by first light, claiming he would be back before the Mortal Men’s new year. The reason of this business dealt with the Burglar and Thorin could say nothing to the Company unless the Hobbit said something first. He would have to speak to her as soon as...

“You’re brooding,” Frerin mumbled from where he slept next to Thorin.

“Am not,” Thorin said.

“If you don’t go to sleep, I’ll knock you out myself,” Frerin said.

“You haven’t been able to beat me yet,” Thorin replied as he gave a small smile to his brother.

“Never said I would play fair,” Frerin said, “We’re fine, Thorin. Dis is the best person to watch out for Bella. I would rather face a dragon than Dis when she’s angry.”

And Thorin said nothing because he felt the same way.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Lembas to everyone who correctly guesses what song Bella was singing in the mines. The “swords are blunt” line is a modified line from *The Hobbit*. I got the idea from this [post](#).

Chapter VIII: A Small Escape

Chapter Summary

In which Bella finds out about the confusing parts of Dwarf culture.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

...the best answer is given by Tolkien, author, critic, and scholar. Yes, he said, fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape? The moneylenders, the knownothings, the authoritarians have us all in prison; if we value the freedom of the mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can. - From *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* by Ursula K. LeGuin (She is referring to *On-Fairy Stories* by J.R.R. Tolkien.)

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella awoke with when she heard something clatter a few feet from her. She sat up and prepared to run, but saw that Bifur had stumbled over some armor Kíli had left too close to the walkway. Dis mumbled something in Khuzdul and gently tapped Bella's arm.

"Sorry, I can't understand you," Bella said.

Dis opened one eye. "Why can't they be quiet? I'm exhausted."

Bella groaned as she rubbed her forehead. "I have to take care of the goats and chickens."

"That's where that lovely cheese comes from, wasn't it?" Dis said.

"I wouldn't say lovely, but yes. I have some livestock that I am able to take care of. It's my own little bit of green in the mountain." Bella stretched and looked around. "Where's Gandalf?"

"He left before the sun rose," Bofur said.

Bella's shoulders slumped for a moment, but rallied quickly. "Anyone wish to meet the producers of their breakfast?"

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Hobbit had repaired the pulley systems throughout Erebor. It was mainly used for transporting heavy goods, but sometimes was used to move people. Dwarves liked to feel stone beneath their feet so they were not very fond of moving platforms. There was much to do since they had closed the back door once they had confirmed that the dragon was dead. Now that all enemies from within were removed, they had to prepare for those from the outside.

"I am terrible sorry that I did this to the royal garden. I could tell it was well cared for before the dragon came," Bella said as she led the Company through the royal quarters of Erebor. She twisted her hands together. "I took out all of the jewels and precious metals from this area. I am very sorry. I can give you a rough estimate of where they are in the treasury and how they looked when you get to restoring it."

"I was worried the dragon would have caused this area to cave in, honestly," Dis said.

"He was focused on the treasury for the first few days. He did go into the throne room, but I repaired it later. I was able to convince him that he would have more gold to look at if he let me take it to him instead of tearing the mountain apart. Once again, I am sorry," Bella said.

"We do not hold it against you," Balin said.

Bella winced as she placed her hands on the wood door. "This wasn't a bedroom, but a parlor and I am very sorry for what I did to it. It was the main room that led to the garden." She swung open the doors to the room.

There. Were. Goats. Everywhere.

The Dwarves stood awkwardly by the hallway door as Bella opened the doors leading to what used to be the royal garden. "I really am sorry." She motioned to the goats. "Come on. Time to go outside." She made clicking noises and the goats warily made their way outside. She next went around the door and opened the chicken coop. "Come on chickies. Come on." This time the Hobbit made noises closer to clucking. "Chanticleer, come on. Stop acting like the rooster you are you featherbrain. I'll feed you to that fox you loathe if you don't come on."

"There are foxes here?" Nori said as he stepped closer to the entrance to the garden.

"Oh, you don't have that tale? Chanticleer and the Fox?" Bella asked as she came back into the parlor/pen to gather feed, "It's a tale about pride and the so-called hero of the story is the rooster, Chanticleer. The Old Took always said that Chanticleer was the hero of the tale once he realized

his pride. Father always said it was Chanticleer's favorite wife who was the hero. She was clever which was better than lucky, though both are quite nice." She began feeding the goats and chickens. "Explore as much as you like. Don't step on the plants. Soon we'll be all out of roughage for the animals. I was thinking of making some jerky and stews with them. I'll space it out with my other supplies. If we use the cram you brought, my guess is that we can survive another month out here before we need help."

The Dwarves made it out into the garden. The chickens and goats watched them thoughtfully, but ultimately went back to their meals. There would have been a beautiful view of the east if not for the desolation Smaug's presence had created.

"Mr. Oakenshield, why hasn't your cousin arrived yet? I would assume the other Dwarves would be eager to come to the aid of their king once the scouting party had been successful," Bella said.

"We are not a scouting party," Thorin stated.

"Well, the first line of offense then," Bella said with a wave of her hand. She frowned. "Where did my basket go?"

Nori popped out of the hen house carrying a basket of eggs. "Lovely place you have, Mistress Hobbit. Good layers, these hens."

Bella took one look in the basket before sticking her hand in Nori's coat pocket. She pulled out an egg. "You are going to have to try harder, Thief, before you can pull one over on me. I was able to steal *mushrooms* from Farmer Maggot *without* getting bitten by his dogs. You are going to be helping me with dinner now as retribution for this."

Nori sniffed his disdain. "You really wouldn't want me to do that."

"Oh, Thief, you were bragging about your, what was it, your 'fleshing knives' and I thought I could use that with helping with one of the chickens," Bella said

Nori squawked. "I wasn't fleshing chickens."

"I'm aware, but it means you have some use with a knife and I won't have idiots bumbling in my kitchen. Bombur, is it alright if I bring him in? Yes? Good," Bella said.

Thorin had moved to the edge of the garden with Dwalin to look out of the mountain. By the shaking of their shoulders, Bella guessed they were laughing. She walked over to them.

"And what is so amusing?" Bella asked as she sauntered up to them.

"You're much feistier than last night," Dwalin said.

"Well, I'm not worrying about dying and Mr. Gandalf vouched for you," Bella said, "What are you lot then if not the first of many Dwarves to come?"

"More are coming now that we know the dragon is dead," Thorin said.

Bella put down the basket of eggs safely on the ground. She spoke quietly as she mimicked Thorin's wide stance with his arms behind his back as they looked east. "None of your Dwarves are from outside the Blue Mountains."

"Correct," Thorin said.

“What of your other kin? Shouldn’t all seven kingdoms of the Dwarves have answered your call?” Bella asked.

“They would not come, not even Dain,” Dwalin growled.

Bella looked over at Dwalin. “But why?”

“Cowards,” Dwalin said.

“They had no reassurance,” Thorin said.

“Reassurance of what?” Bella asked.

“Thorin did not have the Arkenstone,” Frerin said as he stood by Bella. She turned to him. “Grandfather tried to retake Moria, but he and so many other Dwarves died in the attempt. Then Father tried to take back the Mountain about... a hundred years ago.”

Bella could feel Thorin’s tension despite having her back to him. Frerin’s always present cheerfulness faded. “You can tell how that worked out. So, even with the map and key, none wanted anything to do with this quest.”

“But Thorin called upon them. I never understood it, really, but why does a shiny stone have to do with anything being king?” Bella asked.

She heard the gasps from the other Dwarves. “It is a sign of divine favor,” Frerin said.

Bella sighed. “Listen, kings are just stories to me. The closest thing I grew up with was the Thain, my grandfather. Thains are in charge of dealing with big folk. It was hereditary because the Tooks were closest to the border that led to the Blue Mountains and Bree. We vote for every other position. What I meant to say was, isn’t the point of

being king what you do? It's not about a crown or a jewel but..." She tightened her hands into a fist as she felt the anger rise within her, trying to keep the monster within her from making an appearance. "You were going to slay a dragon and save Erebor, Dale, and Esgaroth! You can't be a better king than that, not even in fairy stories! I would follow a king like that. What is wrong with those morons? I'll smack all of them the next time I see them."

Thorin laughed loudly and covered his mouth as he tried to control himself. Bella felt herself blush. "What? What did I say?"

"Fairy stories? That's what you think we are?" Thorin said.

Bella knew that her blush went up to her ears. "Well... you're wearing shoes, so that rather disqualifies you."

Dwalin bent over double with silent laughter. Thorin shook from holding back his own. "My shoes?"

"Yes. No respectable Hobbit or fairy would wear shoes and they are always the heroes of all proper fairy tales," Bella said with a firm nod.

"I beg your pardon miss for not being a fairy tale king," Thorin said with a nod of his head.

Bella smoothed her pants, wishing desperately she had picked up one of her skirts from her room as they passed it earlier. "I grant you my pardon," she said.

Then Thorin smiled at Bella in a way that made her a bit light headed. "My thanks."

"Um, well, I need to..." she twisted her hands together, "... to need... need... need to milk the goats and go kill a

chicken and find some proper clothes.”

Thorin gave orders in Khuzdul to some of the Dwarves. Fíli and Kíli went after the goats while Bombur took care of the chicken. “Lead the way, Miss Baggins. I have wondered where you have been hiding during your time here.”

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Out of all the grand rooms in Erebor, Thorin had not expected the Hobbit to take the servants resting room. It was not even a bed chamber, just a place for those serving the royal family to sleep when they were not off. The Burglar had set up a soft bed with multiple blankets in the room along with two wooden chests, a desk with a chair, a rocking chair, and a large cauldron “for when I just needed some soup for dinner” she said. Miss Baggins called the room her small escape. Thorin could see why as it was the only place he had seen her take any personal touches beyond need. Above the fireplace were the Hobbit’s personal treasures. One item was a closed wooden box. There were two small paintings in gold frame: one was of a female Hobbit and the other a male Hobbit.

Bella pulled out a simple brown skirt, suspenders, a clean shift and shirt, and a red vest she had cut down from a tunic she found in the royal quarters. She paused as she thought for a moment. “Would it be easier to move my things to wherever you decide to set up permanent camp?”

“We will be moving higher up, closer to the gate. The royal quarters are near enough,” Dwalin said.

Bella nodded and went to remove the box from the mantelpiece. “I’ll put these in the kitchen up here after I change.”

“What are they?” Bofur asked.

“Oh, my silverware. My...” Bella closed her eyes and swallowed. “They’re mine. Not Erebor’s. I would like to use them again, if you will permit, Mr. Oakenshield.” She played with the small braid next to her ear. “Oh, can I keep this in until my hair grows back to braiding length? One of the goats ate part of my hair while I slept and it is almost long enough to braid with the rest of my hair.”

Thorin nodded, still looking at the portraits. “Who are they?”

“My parents. My... I was permitted to bring the pictures because the frames were made of gold. Smaug kept the frames and silverware until he died. He didn’t care about the portraits,” Bella said, “They passed a little after my coming of age. It’s thirty-three for Hobbits, not seventy as with Dwarves.”

“No other family, lass?” Bofur asked.

Bella shook her head. “Cousins, aunts, uncles, friends. Never married.”

Ori wrinkled his nose as he thought. “Didn’t you say something about Smaug picking you for more than one reason?”

“Yes,” Bella said cautiously.

“Well,” Ori scratched his head, “I was thinking about fairy stories and how dragons only take maidens and you don’t have any family so...”

“Out! Out now! This conversation is over! Out!” Bella said as she shooed out all of the men. She slammed the door

once it was only her and Dis. “And the maiden thing is so that the dragon didn’t have to worry about children getting their revenge for their parents. It’s easier to rip out one woman’s womb than to burn an entire village!”

She did not realize she had begun crying until Dis dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. “I’m sorry. It’s not their business.”

“Ori was just thinking out loud. I’m sure you will be receiving multiple apologies from the lad,” Dis said.

“Sorry. I’m so sorry. I haven’t... I don’t know how to deal with people after all these years.”

“Well, we’ll help you with that, won’t we?” Dis said.

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After breakfast, the Hobbit took Balin, Dwalin, Ori and the descendants of Thráin to the public library. When they entered the library, Bella smiled and put her hands on a bookcase. “And for my next trick...” she dragged the bookcase back and revealed a hidden alcove.

“That is quite a lot of books,” Ori said with awe.

Bella smiled slightly. “I know. It is roughly a journal a year. Some years I have more to say and some years less. It allowed me to keep a bit of my sanity.” She pulled out four journals and dropped them on the table where Gandalf and Thorin had been studying blueprints and maps of Erebor. “Blood, Bone, Body, and Beauty. A list of the dead as far as I could identify, the structural damage to Erebor, what I took for myself, and sketches of items I could record but not restore.”

“What of the rest?” Balin said.

“A way to cope,” Bella said as she crossed her arms. “I would rather none read those. They are neither useful nor pleasant for anyone else. They are private journals.”

Thorin turned the pages of the book Bella had labeled Beauty. “These are well done.”

“Thank you,” Bella said, feeling warm and pleased. She snapped her fingers. “Oh! I just remembered!” She bustled over to another bookcase revealing another alcove. “I put all of the private journals of Erebor along with the main library. I was worried about keeping them in good repair. It was easier to do it here than to take my tools to each room that held books. I didn’t deal with the records room too much, though that should be in good shape as well.”

“It is,” Balin said.

“Good, good. Let’s see... it was in the royal rooms and then it was... YES! Found it!” She snatched a journal with a blue cover. “Took me a minute. I had to remove the original silver cover because dragons like shiny things. I rebound it.” She presented the book to Thorin.

The Dwarf took it cautiously before opening it. He chuckled. “I never thought to see this again.”

Dis stood on her toes to look over Thorin’s shoulder. “I can’t believe it. I remember you scribbling in that.”

“Uncle Thorin had a journal?” Fili said.

Frerin nodded as he looked through the Book of Bone. “Oh, yes. Grandfather said that a future king should keep a record of his own thoughts so he gave Thorin that journal. I

found it quite scandalous. Lots of really poorly written songs with even worse poetry.”

“Thus why this was private,” Thorin said before smacking Frerin behind the head.

Bella flinched at the motion, but remained where she stood. “I can go try to find the original cover if you want.”

“This cover works well for me. The binding is done well,” Thorin said.

“Once again, thank you,” Bella said.

“More of your... Hobbit knack?” Thorin asked.

“No. I did that by hand. I suppose you would call it one of my crafts?” Bella said as if not entirely sure. “I think you Dwarves would consider me a scholar. I studied and read many books. Mainly languages and lore. My parents’ library was extensive and I read everything I could.” She turned to Ori. “Never wish to have nothing but your books. It is not that pleasant.” Bella moved back to the second alcove. “I can check to see if there are other private journals belonging to the Company or their families.”

“That would be kind of you,” Balin said.

Thorin paused for a moment. “Why did you remember this journal?”

Bella knocked over a book before answering. “Oh, just that the original cover was very ornate. I had never seen anything so fine.”

Thorin motioned around him. “It was not that unusual of a book for the Dwarves. I can think of at least fifty books in

the public library and another twenty in private collections with finer covers.”

“Well, we were talking,” Bella said.

Kíli whispered conspiratorially to the Hobbit, “Did you read Uncle Thorin’s private journal?”

Bella pointedly did not look at anyone. “If I was to do such, it was a century and a half after I came here; I would have been extremely bored.”

Frerin went over to the Hobbit. “And what did you think of the owner of the journal?”

“I would have thought the author of the journal to be an overly romantic, prideful snob who I would smack if I ever met in real life and I would hope that he never became a poet,” Bella said, her voice strong and unwavering.

Frerin, Dis, and Dwalin fell to the floor laughing. Thorin glowered at everyone as he mumbled, “I was only in my twenties.”

Balin tapped a paper Bella had pinned to the back of the bookcase that hid her journals. “Lass, why do you have such questions here?”

“Oh, well,” Bella said as she jumped over Frerin to reach Balin, “I kept track of questions I had about the things I read or found.”

“No one knows about Durin I’s wife,” Ori said.

“He won’t tell us nor will his wife,” Balin said.

“Oh, that leads to one of my other questions,” Bella said. She tapped to a question a few lines down. “What is a ‘Very Important Dwarf’? That’s what the Khuzdul dictionary called the word, but it doesn’t really explain what the word means. I’ve seen Durin, the other Dwarf Fathers, and the wives of the Dwarf Fathers referred to as such, which makes sense, but other Dwarves scattered throughout the historical record are called Very Important Dwarves including Mr. Oakenshield.”

Frerin, Dis, and Dwalin had stopped laughing and stood around the paper along with Ori, Fíli, and Kíli. Thorin moved to stand next to Bella. Dis asked, “What happens to Hobbits when they die?”

Bella shook her head. “We don’t know. We don’t know who made us, who taught us to speak, who taught us how to survive... we don’t even speak much Hobbitish anymore. Just bits and pieces when there are no other words to be found. Nobody knows if we even...” She shivered and shook her head. “I don’t see what that has to do with anything. I know that Dwarves rest in the Halls of Mandos until the world is to be remade.”

“Most, but not all and not for always,” Balin said.

“Durin is reborn,” Bella said, knowing the story well.

“‘And we have Ones,’ Dis said, ‘When one Dwarf is reborn, their One is reborn as well.’ She sighed. ‘Nothing is quite as romantic as when your One holds your hand and says your name for the first time. To have that happen more than once must be so...’”

“We Hobbits don’t have Ones, so I will take your word for it. It makes sense that people’s Ones would be reborn with

them..." Bella said as she waited for someone to explain to her what was going on.

"Some Dwarves are reborn beyond the Seven Fathers and their Wives," Balin said, "There is no word in Common Tongue for it, but Very Important Dwarf is the best translation."

Bella squinted at Thorin. "So... this is another life for you?"

"Yes," Thorin said.

"If you see a name repeated in our records, particularly in a royal line, they are most likely a Very Important Dwarf," Fíli said.

"Though some are named for relatives in their honor... like little Thorin," Dwalin said.

Thorin groaned. "I will never forgive Dain for that."

"You won't forgive him? I won't forgive him! Now I can never do that to you," Frerin grumbled.

"Little Thorin?" Bella said.

"My cousin Dain named his son after me," Thorin said, "But I believe you were asking about Very Important Dwarves.

"Uncle is one as are Glóin and Óin," Kíli said.

"And King Thráin?" Bella asked.

"Aye, he was," Dwalin said.

Bella and Thorin looked at each other, the Hobbit studying the rather amused Dwarf. "So... what's the point?"

“The point is simple,” Thorin said as he tapped the bookcase, “Wisdom comes from experience. Sometimes that experience is better understood from the person who experienced it rather than books or tales.”

“Oh,” Bella said. She snapped her fingers. “Thráin I provided stability for Erebor while Thorin I led his people to a new home in the Grey Mountains.”

“Correct,” Thorin said.

“Wait, should I be saying you led your people?” Bella said.

Thorin hissed as he thought. “Not... really. I have Memories from Thorin I. Mainly of dealing with traveling and establishing settlements. Sometimes I remember specific situations related to dealing with nobles.”

“Oh, and Sibeal,” Dis said.

“That was only twice,” Thorin added.

“That was Thorin I’s wife, wasn’t it?” Bella said.

“Yes,” Thorin said.

“So... you remember parts of your past life, but not all of it?” Bella said.

Balin said, “Aye, lass. Just what we need at the time we need it. Thorin, our Thorin, is his own person, just as Thorin I was his own person.”

Bella tapped her fingers together in agitation.

“You have more questions,” Thorin said.

“They are rude and possibly painful,” Bella said.

"I won't answer if that is so," Thorin said.

Bella nodded. "Glóin was Thorin I's son and Óin was Glóin's son. So, what does that make you and the current Óin and Glóin?"

"Óin and Glóin are brothers and they are my cousins. We are closer than most cousins because we share Memories, but it does not create awkwardness," Thorin said.

"Your Mother was also a Very Important Dwarf?" Bella said.

"She is. She also was reborn a little bit before our Father," Dis said.

Bella blinked. "Wait, is? Isn't she..."

"No, she is very much alive," Thorin said, "She remained in the Blue Mountains due to the injuries she has received over the years making it impossible for her to fight."

"Glóin's wife is also a Very Important Dwarf," Ori added.

"Óin's too before she returned to the Halls of Waiting," Dwalin said.

"Oh, poor Óin. I didn't know," Bella said. She made a noise of concern as she thought of something and pointedly did not look at Thorin.

"It is not always promised that we will find our Ones in each lifetime. Sometimes your One will not recognize you because of the choices you have made. Death happens to us all," Thorin said, catching her thoughts.

"I am sorry that you do not have Sibeal by your side," Bella said.

Thorin cleared his throat. "Thank you."

Bella sighed. "Well, I should... go make lunch. Thank you, good Dwarves. Mr. Oakenshield."

"Lass," Dwalin said as Bella tried to leave, "Oakenshield is not a last name."

"Oh, I know," Bella said as she smiled sweetly, "I just wanted to see Thorin's character."

"And what have you found?" Thorin asked.

"That you have patience for those you believe do not know better," Bella said as she left the library.

The Dwarves stood around for a moment in silence. "Tricky little lass, isn't she?" Dwalin said.

Thorin unfortunately agreed.

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Over the next few days, Thorin observed the Hobbit, trying to find any possibility of betrayal from her. She was unnervingly helpful. Miss Baggins seemed willing and able to help in all manner of chores and crafts. The only nervous habit Bella had was her hands fidgeting when she was thinking or worried about something. She thought and worried quite a lot.

Dis and Bofur had become outright friends with the Hobbit. Dis' sister instincts had taken over what Thorin assumed to be her sanity. "I'm quite sane, Thorin, thank you very much. She won't harm us and you know it." Bofur was ecstatic to have someone new to tell his jokes to

Kíli had begun following Miss Baggins around like a duckling while Fíli and Ori did it more discreetly. Kíli told Thorin, “She doesn’t mind that I ask her questions for just about anything except for the day the dragon came. Obviously not the more gruesome details of her captivity, but she has lots of stories, uncle. She’s not bewitched me or anything of the sort.”

Thorin had not thought of enchantments and it made him more nervous.

Though not as nervous as finding the Burglar and the Thief exchanging tips about snatching cooling sweets while they helped Óin with organizing the Healer’s House to his liking. Nori seemed to take pride in his new protégé.

Óin had accepted Bella almost as quickly as Kíli had once she had given him free use of her garden’s bounty. Glóin had followed his older brother’s example. When Bella had found delight in Glóin’s stories of his son, Bombur spoke of his family as well.

Two days after the wizard had left, Thorin realized that Frerin, Dwalin, and Bifur had not been observing Bella, but observing everyone else. Frerin told Thorin, “She is obviously scared of us and I don’t blame her. We just make sure she knows we are not going to hurt her, but we will hurt anyone from outside who tries to harm her. Besides, someone needs to tell the boys they need to give her some space to breathe.”

The three warriors did not have to worry too much about Bella’s safety since Dori had become extremely fond of her. “She may not be an expert, but the dear does have a lovely hand at needlework.”

The last holdout of sanity was lost three days after the wizard's departure. Balin had taken it upon himself to teach Bella the correct pronunciation of Khuzdul. "She can already read it. Might as well complete her education."

For the life of him, Thorin wished he could trust the Hobbit as his Company seemed to have already done. There was something that made him uneasy in a way he had never been before.

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On the sixth night after Gandalf had left, Thorin examined the blueprints and maps of Erebor in the library of records. Most of the rest of the Company already slumbered. Bifur and Bombur were on guard duty at the gate. Frerin had fallen asleep at the table sitting to the right of his brother. Thorin did not expect a warm mug of tea to be placed by his left hand.

"I am not thirsty, Dis," Thorin said, not bothering to look up.

"Wrong on both counts," Bella said.

Frerin moved to get up, but Thorin put a reassuring hand on his brother's shoulder. The younger Durin rested his head against the table and made incoherent noises as he settled.

"What do you need Miss Baggins?" Thorin asked.

"You didn't eat much at supper. I thought you could use some mint tea," Bella said. She placed reading glasses with gold frames on top of the maps. "These might help you not to strain your eyes."

"I am not quite willing to admit defeat on that front yet," Thorin said as he put the glasses on Frerin's side.

"If I understand Dwarrow aging in comparison to Hobbits, I think you are the same age as I was back before the dragon came. I already was wearing glasses for reading for several years. We all grow old at some point. Either acknowledge it or wear yourself out faster," Bella said.

Thorin glared and Bella glared back. He reluctantly put on the glasses. The writing *was* easier to decipher with the eyewear.

He felt around the table for the mug as he went back to reading. Bella took his left hand and placed it against the cup. "Good night, Thorin." She gave his hand a squeeze of friendly affection and left.

Thorin froze in place. His mind tried to understand what had just happened. *I just had to find my One right as I reclaimed Erebor and she is not even a Dwarf.*

Chapter End Notes

A/N: In which Thorin is shocked, but the reader is not.

If sometime over the next couple of days I stop posting every day, it means I have caught the stomach flu from my sister. It does not mean this story is not going to be published, just that it will be put off for a few days.

The idea about the Very Important Dwarves a combination of Durin, the Elves in *The Silmarillion*, and this [post](#).

A note on dates: from my research, it is generally agreed that Durin's Day was on October 23rd. Then the

Battle of the Five Armies took place on November 23rd. For the purposes of this fic, the Battle will take place at the end of December. My reasoning is A. Smaug did not light up Laketown so it took time for word to get out that the dragon was dead. B. Because of plot reasons.

Also, here is a great quote on desolation. "The effect of this cannot be understood without being there. The beauty of it cannot be understood, either, and when you see beauty in desolation it changes something inside you. Desolation tries to colonize you." From *Annihilation*, Book 1 of *The Southern Reach Trilogy* by Jeff Vandermeer.

Chapter IX: Unexpected Visitors

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

One of the most cowardly things ordinary people do is to shut their eyes to facts. — From *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis

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The next morning, Frerin waited outside of the dining hall to ambush Thorin with his brotherly concern. “You seemed to have problems sleeping last night.”

“No more than usual,” Thorin said. He flexed his left hand, still trying to shake off the feeling of Bella’s hand on his as she said his name.

“Uh huh. That’s why you kept stealing my blanket. You only do that when you have nightmares,” Frerin said. The brothers walked together towards the library.

“Not nightmares.” Thorin glanced around and was relieved to see no one following them. “I had Memories of Sibeal.”

“Newly returned ones?” Frerin said.

“Yes,” Thorin said.

Frerin made “go on” motions.

“It was in Erebor. Scenes from their courtship. Sibeal was not impressed with him being heir to Erebor,” Thorin said.

Frerin snorted a laugh. "I doubt she would be. Quite the Dwarf from everything that I've read."

"She was, yes."

"And that's why you couldn't sleep? The Memories?"

"Partially," Thorin said.

"Partially?"

"The timing."

"The timing?"

Thorin groaned. "Must you repeat everything I say?"

"It is tempting."

"This is the third time I have had Memories of Sibeal."

Frerin looked up at the vaulted ceilings for a moment as he thought about when Thorin had told him of the Memories.

"The first was some time after Smaug attacked and the second time was a little bit before we settled in the Blue Mountains."

Thorin flexed his left hand again. "More specific."

"I don't know. Those were rather hectic days. Can you just tell me what you're getting at?" Frerin said.

"The day Smaug attacked and the day we entered the Shire are when I had Memories of Sibeal," Thorin said.

"Alright... and?"

“I know it is under used, but please use your mind and actually think about it for a moment.”

Frerin punched Thorin’s arm. “Mum says I’m smart.”

“Compared to a rock, maybe.”

After giving his brother another punch in the arm, Frerin thought for a moment and then gasped. “No.”

“I don’t truly know. Is it even possible? She isn’t a Dwarf and...”

Fíli ran towards his uncles. “The Master of Laketown is here and so are some Elves!”

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Bella watched through a hole in the wall made at the gate. She had come to the entrance almost as soon as she was told save for a quick stop at her room to pick up a few important items which she kept hidden in a bag. Balin tried to soothe the small army that was waiting at the entrance of Erebor until Thorin could be found.

“What do the Elves want?” Bella asked Dori, who was the only other Dwarf who was present who was not along the top of the wall. There were a dozen Elves, but their presence was unexpected to the Hobbit.

“We might have made a deal with them,” Dori said.

“Why would you do that? I know they did not offer aid when Smaug came,” Bella said.

Dori sighed. “We were traveling through their lands when the Elves found us. They said we were trespassing, which is

utter nonsense. There are still travelers through the Elves' lands... not many, but some. The only reason we were not thrown in the dungeons was because of Gandalf's presence. Thorin and the Elf king..."

"Thranduil?"

"Yes, Thranduil. They argued and many insults were thrown about. Some sort of necklace was supposedly not given to the Elven king during Thrór's time and Thorin told Thranduil that it was because the Elves were greedy and would not pay and... well..." Dori motioned to the army of Elves. "Thorin said he would try to find the necklace for Thranduil if he let us through to Long Lake."

Bella smirked. "*Try* being the word."

"Thorin may be impatient at times, but he is not a complete idiot," Frerin said.

Bella and Dori turned to the king and his brother. Thorin carried Orcrist and a battle ax while Frerin had the matching ax as well as an ornately carved bow.

"Have they tried to storm the gate yet?" Thorin asked.

"Not yet. No shots fired," Dori said.

Thorin climbed to the top of the gate to join the rest of the Dwarves save for Bifur who was preparing weapons for use if necessary. Frerin and Dis flanked their brother. Frerin stood on Thorin's right with Fíli and Kíli while Dis was at his left with Balin. Bella pulled up the hood of cloak and put on her gloves as she joined the others at the top of the wall next to Balin. The sight of the army was even more impressive from above. A fair green banner waved from the small party of Elves and a blue banner represented the

Men of the Lake. She recognized the Master of Laketown riding a horse who looked weary from its large burden.

Thorin hailed them in a loud voice. "Who are you that come armed for war to the gates of Thorin son of Thráin, King Under the Mountain?"

"Hail Thorin!" said the Master, "Why do you fence yourself like a robber in his hold? We are not yet foes, and we rejoice that you are alive and that the dragon is dead. We are here for a parley and a council."

"And this armed force is merely to observe than? I find it a bit over dramatic for a few nights' lodgings from the Men of the Lake," Thorin said.

"Would you rather have us address a king with a small party not worthy of his status?" the Master said.

Bella whispered to Balin, "Can you go down to them as a representative to discuss matters of payment? A king should not have to deal with bill collectors."

Balin said, "That might cool tensions if we at least talk to them so Thorin does not deal with the Elves directly."

"Try to see if you can speak to Bard the Bowman as Laketown's representative. He is a descendant of the last Lord of Dale. Make a connection to him and it will help us in the future," Bella said.

"Will do, lass," Balin said.

Balin spoke to Dis who passed the message to Thorin. The Dwarf King said, "Come now. This is unnecessary force and we will get nothing done by shouting at each other. Let us

each send representatives to discuss this trifling matter at the gate.”

“So you will fulfill your debt?” the Master said.

Thorin said nothing, but motioned to the Dwarves to lower a rope so Balin could go speak to the representatives. Bella ducked down and knelt behind Dis so the armies at the gate would not see her.

“Oakenshield, don’t look, but I need to speak with you,” Bella said.

Thorin spoke in a low tone so none but those around him could hear. “What is the matter Hobbit? I am preoccupied at the moment.”

“This will only take a moment of your time. Can I go and see them? They have to know that your Company is here, so I can go down without too many questions since Bifur hasn’t shown himself,” Bella said.

“Why on Arda would you want to go down?” Thorin said.

“I’ve never met an Elf before,” Bella said.

“They are not worth meeting,” Thorin said.

“I have dealt with the Men of the Lake for over a century and a half. I am hoping we can speak to a man I know for his wisdom and kindness. I can help Balin.” Bella tugged at Thorin’s coat and looked up at him as innocently as she was able. “Please, your Majesty?”

A few minutes later Balin and Bella in shoes and a cloak went to speak with the Elves and Men. Bella was not sure if she heard Frerin snicker over something he said to Thorin.

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"How do you lot walk in these shoes? I have never got the knack of it," Bella said.

"It stops our feet from being injured and keeps them warm," Balin said, "A little bit more weight is worth it."

"Well Hobbits don't..." Bella made it look like she tripped over her feet and fell in the mud. She covertly covered the scales on her face and her beard with a bit of mud before standing up. Her gloves, sleeves, and boots covered the rest that might give her away.

"I'm alright, Balin," Bella said as the Dwarf helped her to her feet.

"If you say so, lad," Balin said.

Bella was glad that her face was mostly hidden when she heard Balin say "lad". She knew from what Dis and the books had told her that Dwarf women generally hid their sex when dealing with those besides Dwarves, but she had not expected to fall under that category. (Particularly as she was not hiding her curves very well, but she was not going to bring that up with any male Dwarf. She was quite respectable, thank you very much.)

Two Elves were sent as representatives, both tall and dressed in greens and browns. The male had green eyes and long blonde hair in a simple braid. The other, a female Elf, had dark hair that was in long dreads and eyes the color of amber.

One man was sent by the Master who Bella knew to be Alfrid, the Master's assistant. He was a slimy, weasel like

character who often made Bella want to throw him into Long Lake on more than one occasion.

Before Balin could say anything, Bard came out of the crowd, a bow and quiver of arrows slung across his back. He looked a bit older than he should as a Mortal Man of thirty-five, but his wife had passed a little over a year before. "My apologies," Bard said as he stood near (but not by) Alfrid.

Bella pulled out a sack hidden beneath her cloak and handed out each participant a cup before pouring them some wine. "To common sense," Bella said in as low of a tone as was natural to her.

The others warily toasted and took a sip of the wine, finding it to be a good quality. "Now, I also brought some bread and cheese that matches well with that wine, but I'm afraid we do not have a table. It would be a bit awkward just standing here, yes? It is a bit difficult to bring down a table when one is climbing down a rope."

Balin looked ill at ease with such a suggestion, but soon there was a table. Food from both Elves and Men appeared quite soon afterwards. The group spoke quietly about favorite food pairings while Bella cut up some cheese with a Dwarven cheese knife made of silver.

"Now, good folk, what seems to be the matter?" Bella said.

Alfrid spoke first, "We have yet to be paid for our early investment in the quest of the Dwarves."

"Investment?" Balin said as if the word was made of slime.

"Aye, investment. How were we to know you were to return? Or would not wake the dragon?" Alfrid said.

“Well, I think a wizard would be good enough reliability to vouch for anyone, be he a bit mysterious,” Bella said.

“I would like to know of the dragon,” Bard said.

“Oh, yes,” Bella said, “About that.” She pulled out a long, wrapped parcel from behind her back. “Mr. Bard, if you remember, a little less than a year ago, your black arrow disappeared.”

Bard furrowed his brow. “How...?”

Bella unwrapped the parcel and showed a black arrow smelling still of dragon. The group covered their noses and mouths. “The dragon is dead. No Free Folk did it, but I brought you evidence of his demise. I would not touch it with bare hands. It is poisonous from the blood.”

Bard shook his head. “How could a Dwarf...”

Bella pushed back her hood. “My deepest apologies. I was passing through and...”

“YOU!” Alfrid and Bard said at the same time.

Bella grinned. Balin said, “What did you do?”

“Oh, nothing but a few pranks as I came into town for trade,” Bella said.

“This girl and her family have been a menace to Lake Town for generations!” Alfrid said, “Every year a blonde girl comes into town, trades, and then causes nothing but mischief.”

Bella shrugged. “It was just some rotting fish in your shoes, Mr. Alfrid. Hardly a menace.”

"Aye, but you did steal from me last year," Bard said.

"Just the arrow and I have returned it," Bella said.

"Why? And how did you know I had it?" Bard said.

"Stories," Bella said as if that had all the answers. She sighed. "I do feel a bit bad though, for that mischief." She dumped all of her silverware on the table and pushed it towards Alfrid. "To Lake Town, from me."

"Where did you get this?" Alfrid said, his eyes gleaming at the large pile of silver.

"Where do you think?" Bella said without answering, "They're not greedy, these Dwarves. This is just from me showing them where Smaug died. How do you think they will treat allies?"

Alfrid's mouth snapped shut.

Balin said, "The price of the goods and the assistance that we received of the Lake-men we will fairly pay. We do not have even have our kin yet amongst us. How can we have trade routes and negotiations amongst old allies as winter settles in and the people settle-in for staying at home?"

"Do you think anything, even a loaf's worth, would be given to you under threat of force?" Bella said, "The Dwarves see an armed host before their doors. How would you react to such a thing?" She tried not to smile as she saw the Elves look uncomfortable.

"We are here to pay for our supplies and shelter during our time in Laketown," Balin said as he placed a sack of coins in front of Alfrid.

The Master's assistant looked put out by such an easy trade, but took the money back. Bard remained behind, staring curiously at Bella. "Your family is generally not here until the end of November."

"Bit of a rough year," Bella said. "Your children are well I hope?"

"They are, yes," Bard said.

Bella wrapped up the black arrow and covertly slipped a piece of paper into the parcel. "Take good care of this, Mr. Bard. May it continue to protect your family."

Bard bowed his head. Bella turned to the Elves. "Now, what seems to be the matter with you lot?"

"Excuse me?" Laisidhiel said. She was the Elf with dreads.

"Why are you lot here? Honestly, I have never heard of Elves acting so rashly," Bella said. This was completely untrue, but it was good to remind the Elves that they were being irrational.

"We are here to collect what is rightfully our king's," Maeglad said as he brushed back some of his blonde hair.

"I understand that, I really do, but I neither understand this force nor this speed. Here I thought Elves were patient," Bella said.

Maeglad looked ready to snap something back, but Laisidhiel put a hand on his arm. "Dwarves are not known to willingly give up their treasure. What we ask for is from that due from payment already given."

Balin nodded. "And we are searching for it, but it is not our only priority. We will give it to you when we can. It is a bit of a mess in there." He pinched Bella's arm to keep from speaking out.

"And how long do you think this will take?" Laisidhiel asked.

"Give us at least a month to bury our dead," Balin said.

Laisidhiel bowed her head. "Of course. We shall return at the beginning of the Men's month of December."

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Frerin held Thorin back when they saw Bella remove the hood of her cloak. "Idiot. Stupid, stupid idiot," Thorin hissed.

"Now, now, let's see what she's doing," Frerin said.

Thorin gripped the stone ledge while the Hobbit and Balin spoke with the representatives of the hosts. In what seemed an eternity and no time at all, the two returned to Erebor. Once the Dwarf and Hobbit were over the wall, Thorin growled, "Follow me, now."

There was a meeting chamber just past the gate, close enough for an emergency meeting, but far enough away for none to overhear them. Frerin, Dis, Fíli, and Kíli joined Thorin as well as Balin and Bella.

Thorin glared at the Hobbit. "What did you do?"

"I did what I had to," Bella said.

"And what was that?" Thorin said.

"I showed them that you would treat someone not a Dwarf with generosity, that you had plenty of food, and that the dragon was dead. That's what I did," Bella said.

"You were there to observe. You could have had the host descend upon you with one misplaced word," Thorin said.

Bella nodded. "I am aware of that. I was not always with the dragon only, Oakenshield. I was once a very respectable Hobbit."

"I don't care about a silly Hobbit's ability to speak politely over tea if it will get my people killed!"

Bella put her hands on her hips and glared up at the Dwarf king. "Now listen here, *your majesty*, you don't know what being *respectable* means."

Thorin stood up straighter as he tried to make her realize that she would not win this argument. The Hobbit seemed undisturbed, however, as she continued. "*Respectable* means you know *everyone*. You memorize the family trees, listen to gossip, and sit through the most boring of teas. A *respectable* Hobbit is one that is soft-spoken to those in need and at the same time must be willing to deal with the roughest of characters to make a deal. A *respectable* Hobbit has power and I had the most in the Shire besides the heads of the families. I can deal with greedy folk just as well as you can and with less bloodshed."

Bella took a deep breath and almost touched Thorin's arm, but pulled back at the last moment. "I have been listening to several generations of politics in Laketown as well as their problems with Greenwood. The Master is a cruel and greedy man who would have never taken payment from you unless it was to bleed you dry. We paid him in front of the Elves so that if he moved against you, the whole world

would know about his greed and the Elves would not trade with him. The Woodland Realm is Laketown's main source of income since Erebor fell.

"I returned the black arrow to Bard both to show that the dragon was dead and to begin a relationship between Erebor and Dale. Bard is a descendant of Girion, Lord of Dale. He is also the greatest opposition to the Master, which will help you in the long run.

"Finally, you need time to deal with the Elves. Balin said we needed time to bury the dead, which the Elves must give us. Thranduil is claiming that the necklace he wants was for his wife before she passed. It is an utterly untrue excuse. She passed on years before he commissioned the necklace. He is just greedy and wants the white gems in the necklace. However, if you do not give the necklace to him, he will claim you cold-hearted and greedy for not letting him have the last thing connected to his wife."

Thorin said, "But that does not mean we will give him what has not been paid for."

Bella huffed. "Thorin, no one will care. It is an excuse for war. Thranduil is immortal. He needs to do something to break up the tedium. Now, you need to get over this desire of yours to die in glory and avoid war for as long as possible. Now, we have to..."

"What do you mean?" Thorin said.

"Oh for the love of..." Bella made her voice as gruff as possible. "'I'll go slay the dragon who killed my people. No one can fault me for trying to retake Erebor and at least I won't die in the Blue Mountains waiting to die of old age'." She spoke in her normal voice again. "I am not sorry about that. You are just going to have accept that you are not

going to be a king that they sing battle ballads about and suffer through living as a loved old man. Why would Ilutavar and his creations make kings and queens, if not to protect the ones who can't protect themselves? You brought harm and not good to you people if you died before your time!"

The room fell unusually quiet. Bella blinked rapidly. "I thought... I thought that was... that was why you were here. No one sane would come up against a dragon." She swallowed hard. "I know... I thought it would be better to fight and die than live with the guilt if I didn't and..."

Thorin interrupted. "I would not have let harm come to the Company."

Bella nodded. "I know you think you could protect them, but trust me, there are consequences to actions made in pride. You may have died in battle, yes, but you probably would have... have had to watch your nephews die before you did or something equally as terrible. Now please, Thorin, I beg of you, you must think of how you will survive in the long run and not just your temporary pride."

Thorin crossed his arms over his chest. "And what are you thinking? You obviously have your own scheme in this."

Bella rolled her eyes. "Hardly. I'm a Hobbit. I'm thinking about food. I brought the snacks because I wanted the Elves and Men to think we had enough food so something that frivolous would not matter to our supplies. We may make it to December. Dain needs to come and resupply Erebor. We can't do that with an army between us and him. Not to mention it will take a few well-placed hits with a battering ram to take down the gate. It is an utter wreck. In a month's time, I can repair the gate so it could withstand

anything the Elves or Men could hit us with if the other Dwarves helped me refine the structure. I'll start work today."

"Could it withstand a dragon?" Thorin said.

"No. I wouldn't even know how to begin to do that. Maybe if the gates were mithril, but that would require the reclaiming of Moria. There is not enough mithril here to make what we would need," Bella said.

Thorin nodded. "We'll make a plan then." He leaned down so they were eye to eye again. "Do not undermine Balin's authority as my representative again."

"Yes, sir," Bella said, "May I please go speak with the others so we can start making plans for the gate?"

Thorin motioned she could leave. Once she did, Thorin was simultaneously yelled at and comforted by his family for his pride.

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That evening, Bofur came to the king in the common area of the royal quarters they had turned into their home base. "Have you seen Bella?"

"Not since this morning, no," Thorin said.

"I've asked everyone, but we can't find her," Bofur said.

"Maybe she has gone to the library. She likes it there," Thorin said.

"No, Ori said he hasn't seen her," Bofur said.

Bifur came running into the room. *"The Hobbit has food! Bags and bags of food!"*

Thorin and Bofur followed Bifur to the gates of Erebor. Half way there, they found Bella being followed by Fíli and Kíli with five bags between them.

"You! What were you doing?" Thorin shouted at his nephews.

"We didn't do anything, Bella just showed up with this," Fíli said.

"You undersized burglar! What did you do?" Thorin said.

Bella dropped the bags she was carrying. "I didn't steal anything. I gave a note to Bard. I had to deal with that wretched Alfrid as well. If he wasn't there, I would have gotten another bag of food and..."

"What did you promise them?"

"Nothing! I told them I was leaving you lot because I didn't want to stick around a bunch of..."

"Then what did you steal from us!" Thorin said.

Bella flinched. By then, all of the Dwarves were in the hallway. "I didn't steal anything. I keep telling you this."

Thorin motioned to the food. "Then how did you get this?"

"Well, the Men knew I was good for money when I gave them my silverware..."

"Your silverware?" Thorin said.

“Yes, the ones I was allowed to bring with me from the Shire? Didn’t Balin tell you? Well anyway, I knew the gold frames would be worth...”

“The ones that held your parents’ portraits?” Thorin said slowly as he realized what the Hobbit had done.

“It’s not like I own other gold frames,” Bella said. She frowned as the Dwarves around her sniffled. “What? Did I miss something?”

“You gave up items crafted by your people? Things from your family?” Thorin asked.

Bella blinked. “Of course. They’re just things. My family would much rather I take care of my friends and feed them for another few weeks than have shiny things collecting dust.”

“You cared for those things,” Thorin said.

“Well, yes, but you’re my Dwarves. Why wouldn’t I take care of you?” Bella said.

Thorin pulled Bella into an embrace. She did not reciprocate, but also did not pull away. “What’s going on?”

“You are always welcome in the halls of Erebor as a Dwarf-Friend,” Thorin said as the Dwarves around him cheered.

Bella hesitantly returned the hug. “Thank you? Don’t understand what all the fuss is about, but alright.”

Thorin pulled away and smiled at her. “Thank you, Burglar.”

She smiled back. “Hardly a Burglar if I pay back everyone.”

“That’s true,” Nori added causing the others to laugh.

After that, the Hobbit was accepted as another member of the Company.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Though I don't watch the show, there is a *Game of Thrones* reference in this chapter. It is a really good quote, guys.

Once again, all hail [Arwen-Undomiel](#). You have been saving fanfic writers when it comes to Elvish since the LOTR movies came out. Bless your dear, nerdy heart.

You have to see this [artwork](#) . Isn't it gorgeous?

Chapter X: Dragon Sickness

Chapter Summary

In which hair is talked about at length (pun intended).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Oh, monsters are scared," said Lettie, "That's why they're monsters." — From *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman

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Bella brushed out her curly hair in her room after her bath the evening she returned with food. She was not quite sure what to think. Thorin had been cold to her ever since she had proved not be an immediate threat and then he hugged her. Bella had been so surprised she had not fought back and had even returned the embrace. She was not sure what it meant for her mind if she was so careless in letting someone close. Gandalf had been out of sheer relief. Dis out of necessity to not be considered strange.

There was a crash from the common area. Bella dashed out to find out if someone had been hurt. She found Kíli wrestling Fíli and soundly beating him.

"Hello, Miss Baggins," Fíli wheezed as he tried to break free of his brother's grasp.

"Are you boys alright?" Bella said.

"Oh, we're fine. Just settling a bet," Kíli said.

Bella sighed. "Don't scuff up the floors, boys."

"They won't, Bella," Frerin said.

Thorin growled something in Khuzdul that Bella had not learned yet. Frerin said something back and put on an "I would never do anything unseemly" face. Dis seemed surprised and then amused by the interaction.

"Bella, dear Hobbit, where have you been hiding all those curls?" Dis said.

"I need to cut it actually and..."

The Dwarves went into an uproar. Bella face palmed. She had forgotten for a moment how important hair was to the Dwarves. "Forget I ever said it. I'll keep it back and..."

Bella found herself sitting in front of Dis on the floor, suddenly having her hair braided. "Oh, dear lass, it's just hard to keep up with by yourself. I'll make sure you have something lovely every day and it won't affect your work. How about that?"

"Um... uh... sure?" Bella said.

Dis made a pleased noise at the same time Thorin made a distressed one. Bella was about to move, when Bofur threw himself on the ground in front of her and groaned.

"Are you alright, Bofur?" Bella asked.

"I'm hankerin' for a story," Bofur said as he winked at her.

"Now what kind of story?" Bella said as she smiled.

"Not a kissing one!" Fíli said.

"Ain't nothing wrong with a bit of romance in a story," Kíli said.

"Agreeing with Fíli on this one, no kissing," Frerin said before sticking out his tongue.

"Might as well have a bit of adventure if there is no romance," Dis said.

"A quest, maybe?" Ori added.

Several Dwarves said at the same time, "Treasure!"

"A story told by Hobbit's," Thorin said quietly.

Bella wriggled her nose as she thought. "Hobbits don't care much for treasure. I know lots of stories about Dwarves and treasure..." she snapped her fingers as an idea came to her. "What do you know of the tales the Hobbits gathered during the Wandering Years?"

"What are the Wandering Years?" Bofur said.

"Do you remember the night we first were properly introduced and I mentioned Hobbits left their first home? Those are the Wandering Years. We looked for a home for years and years and Hobbits had so many adventures, most decided never to have adventures again," Bella said, "But the story I am going to tell you was told to them from a trader from the far, far East, far, far away from the Lonely Mountain."

"And there's adventure?" Dwalin asked.

"And treasure?" Glóin asked.

“And it even has a Hobbit since that’s the version the Hobbits made after hearing it,” Bella said.

“TELL IT!” the Dwarves said.

“Now, this story is part of a much longer one which in itself is part of a greater story, but this is the one I think you will all like best.” Bella cleared her throat before starting.

“There was once a boy named Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”

Bella gave a brief overview of the bigger tale Eustace’s personal story was a part of. There was a great quest to find the Seven Lords and then the Emperor Across the Sea’s Country. Eustace was a selfish and cruel boy. He fell asleep on dragon’s gold and became a dragon himself. It was a terrible thing to be a dragon; Eustace so wished he could be himself again. However, he found himself to be more useful to his friends as a dragon than he had ever been as a little boy. Still, being a dragon was no fun and dangerous. One night, the great Lion, son of the Emperor Across the Sea, healed Eustace and returned him back as a little boy, but a little boy who had learned his lesson about not being greedy and loving his friends more than himself.

“We have stories like that,” Balin said as he puffed on his pipe after Bella had finished the story.

“Aye, fairy stories about Dwarves who lost sight of what treasure really means to the Children of Mahal,” Dwalin added.

“They mean memories, don’t they? You create things like Aulë created you in honor of him,” Bella said hesitantly.

“Aye, lass,” Balin said, “We were made by Mahal in joy and love and we should do the same with what we make.”

“But not to the point of ignoring those we love,” Bofur said.

“For Mahal did not tell his wife, Yavanna, of what he made and how it could hurt her,” Frerin said.

Thorin finished, “So her creations always fight against his. Nowhere in the tales does it say they ever fully reconciled. So we must remember that there is joy to be found in what we create, but there is more joy to be found in sharing with those we love.”

Bella smiled at the Company. “Did you know when I decided you were not thieves? That first night, you sang of this place with such loss and love, I knew that no burglar would sing such, only those who had their home taken from them.”

Dis placed a hand softly on Bella’s shoulder. “And we have you to thank for having a home.”

Bella shook her head. “It’s not a home yet, but that will come.”

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The next few weeks fell into a pattern. After breakfast, the Dwarves would go to work on the gate until Bella was ready to faint from exhausting herself using her knack. If the gate could not continue to be repaired safely without Bella, the Dwarves would go to work on the interior of Erebor to work on refurbishing the gold and jewels that used to be a part of the mountain. After lunch, work continued on the gate until Bella was ready to faint yet again. After the sun set, the Dwarves would work on small crafts from repairing clothes to carving toys. Stories were told and songs were sung. Each night, Dis would braid Bella’s hair.

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Then there were the odd parts, at least in Bella's mind. Thorin seemed to be watching her even more than before he called her Dwarf-friend. If he considered her a threat, it would have been before and not after such a public display of confidence in her. They did not speak together particularly more than Bella did with the rest of the Company.

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Bofur was her constant companion whenever they were not working. At first, Bella worried that it was because he pitied her because of the "curse". She then realized it was because they both enjoyed a good tale or side-splitting joke. Often, they would sit in front of the fire while Bofur carved a toy for one of Bombur's children and Bella worked on "expanding" her wardrobe.

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The clothes had been unexpected. Dori had shown up one day with yards of cloth from the weaver's guild and told Bella, "If you don't make yourself some clothing made for someone of your station, I'll force you into them myself."

"I'm just a Hobbit who is working on repairing the city," Bella said.

"You are the Guardian of Erebor. From what you've told us, your Grandfather was a king, thus making you a princess," Dori said.

"I'm not a princess. The Old Took wasn't a king, just something similar to one," Bella said.

Dori muttered something in Khuzdul that Bella roughly translated as “idiot” with a variety of swearing. “Listen, lass, we don’t plan on making you work forever. We are going to treat you like the lady you are. Until I can get some proper tailors, we are just going to have to make you some clothes ourselves. Winter is setting in and you only have that ratty blue coat and Dwalin’s spare cloak to keep you warm. You are going to be dressed as a fine lady ought to and that’s final.”

Ori said as he passed with a pile of scrolls, “I wouldn’t argue, Bella. He’ll make your life very miserable if you don’t.”

Nori appeared suddenly with horror stricken eyes and that was all Bella needed to know that Dori would win this argument.

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Dwalin was quite insistent that Bella learn to protect herself. Sometimes Bella’s afternoons were spent in learning how to fight with a dagger or sword. “Lass, we can’t always protect you.”

“I’m not too worried about someone attacking me,” Bella said. *They won’t know what monster they will unleash if they did.*

“Blasted Hobbit, you will know how to use a sword, or so help me, I will make Balin teach you,” Dwalin growled.

“Don’t do it,” Frerin said, “I still can’t do push-ups without crying.”

Bella rolled her eyes at Frerin’s exaggeration. “I don’t want to fight.”

"We noticed," Thorin said, "The only part of the treasury that was not well-tended was the weaponry."

"There is nothing glorious about taking a life, no matter how evil it may be," Bella said. She hoped her voice did not shake.

Thorin nodded. "My father use to say, 'I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory, I love only that which they defend.' We may not wish to take a life, but sometimes it is necessary."

Bella shook her head. "I'll learn so the rest of you won't worry, but I don't willingly wish to do so."

"None of us do," Thorin said.

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The next day, Thorin presented her with a shirt of chainmail. "You may not wish to kill, but I will guess you have no wish to die."

Bella took the shirt and said, "This is mi..."

"I know, and you are the only one of the Company who it will fit and the one who is the least able to defend themselves."

"I don't deserve..."

"You deserve this and more, Mistress Hobbit," Thorin said, "For the sake of the Company, please."

Bella slipped the mithril chain mail on over her shirt and bodice thinking the whole time, *Gandalf, please come back*

soon. I can't keep pretending to be harmless when I could kill them all in a moment.

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As December began, Bella asked over breakfast, "Thorin, how goes finding the necklace?"

"It goes," Thorin said.

Bella rolled her eyes. "Stop being a majestic idiot and find the stupid thing."

Frerin covered his face as he tried to silence his laughter. "I'm going to have to use that sometime," he squeaked.

Thorin growled, "I will not give that pointy-eared..."

"Excuse me! I have pointy-ears you round-eared cretin. King Thranduil will attack you without remorse if you don't give him the necklace. If you give it to him, he will so be in the wrong none could deny it," Bella said.

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"I can't believe I am giving him a single piece of the treasure," Thorin mumbled as he, Bella, and Frerin made their way into the treasury.

"It is better to appease him now so you can gain support later," Bella said. She huffed. "Speaking of which, I am going to smack that cousin of yours when I see him."

"He can hardly come when his capitol is under siege," Thorin said.

"Hmmm... you would have defeated the invaders by now," Bella said.

Thorin said nothing, knowing it was not true, but also trying not to be pleased the Hobbit believed him to be capable of such. Bella led them through the treasury. "Mithril and white gems. Should be... here. Not too much mithril so It should be easy to sort through."

Bella wandered off to return the silver bead she had borrowed as Thorin and Frerin shifted through the treasure. Thorin seethed the entire time. Thranduil had no right to any of the treasure. He never paid the Dwarves of Erebor. He never offered aid after the dragon attacked. The treasure, all of it, belonged to Thorin. The Elf was a lying, greedy...

"Thorin?" Frerin said as he touched Thorin's shoulder.

The king shook his head from the thoughts that were beginning to take over his mind. "It does not belong to Thranduil."

"I know, but the Hobbit is right. Thranduil can go to war over what he considers a slight," Frerin said.

Thorin picked up the delicately wrought necklace. It had been decades, but he remembered the fine craftsmanship put into the jewels. His mother had supervised the design and had taken great pride in it.

"Where is the Hobbit?" Frerin said as Thorin passed the necklace to him.

"Over here," Bella said.

The brothers wandered through the piles of treasure and found Bella sitting in front of a pile of gold crowns. She held a gold crown with flowers made of amethyst. "Who did this belong to?" she asked.

“It is one of the consort’s crown,” Thorin said.

“When was it made, though?” Bella asked.

“We would have to look through the records, but I would guess during Thorin I’s reign. Amethyst was his wife’s favorite gem,” Frerin said.

Bella turned the crown over in her hands. She had dealt with it before at some point during her organizing of the treasure hoard, but it seemed oddly special, though she had no idea why. Purple was not a color she was particularly drawn to and certainly not gold.

“It’s quite light. Practical, almost,” Bella said as she put it aside, “Come on. We’re almost done with the gate. I want to be finished before the end of the week.”

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A few days later, Thorin awoke to the grinning faces of his nephews. “Morning, uncle,” Kíli said.

“We were wondering if we could ask you something,” Fíli said.

Thorin shoved them both off his bed at the same time.
“How. Are. You. Awake. You. Blasted. Pitiful. Excuses. For. Dwarves”

“It is hard to catch a moment alone with you,” Fíli said.

“We were feeling a bit neglected,” Kíli added.

“Neglected? More like bored,” Thorin groaned.

“Same. Difference,” Kíli said.

Thorin rolled out of bed and lay on the floor for a moment before getting up. He began putting on the multitude of layers he wore around the mountain. Once they had the coal mines opened and relit the forges, the mountain would be a more pleasing temperature. As it was, unless one was by a fire, it was freezing.

“Mother said we should take care of you this morning. She says you need to rest a little since the gate is finished,” Fíli said.

“And she sent you two?” Thorin said shaking his head.

“Well, it was that or Frerin and she was worried you might throttle him,” Fíli said.

“And certainly not Dwalin. He would throttle you,” Kíli said.

Thorin grumbled as he followed Fíli and Kíli to the common area to the roaring fire. They sat on the floor as Fíli and Kíli redid Thorin’s braids, chatting about this and that. Thorin blocked it out as he tried to regain his normal capacity for activity. When Bella handed him a mug of tea as they were among the few awake, he smiled at her before she left causing Fíli and Kíli to badly hide their laughing fit.

“What?” Thorin growled.

“Nothing, uncle. You just seem... pleasant,” Fíli said.

“Yes, pleasant,” Kíli said.

Then the two did start laughing in earnest, leaning against each other for support. Thorin narrowed his eyes. “I can be pleasant.”

Fíli and Kíli fell to the ground. “You’re never pleasant,” Fíli wheezed.

Thorin finished his braids and stepped over his laughing nephews. “Honestly, I can be pleasant,” Thorin mumbled to himself.

Dwalin happened to be standing near Thorin and he started laughing right along with Fíli and Kíli.

Thorin ignored the Dwarves and went to the kitchen. Bella and Bombur were toasting the cram Bella had bought from Laketown in the hopes that it would taste better. (It did not, but they still tried anyway.) The other Dwarves trickled into the kitchen in various stages of consciousness. The Ravens stood watch over the gates during meals for the Dwarves.

Bella set out the cram along with the little bit of jam they had left. “Eat up. I think we could start putting up some of the guard rails around Erebor. Does that sound like a good plan, Thorin?”

“It would be good to not have Dwarves falling off the walkways. Permission granted,” Thorin said as he reached for a piece of cram.

Óin was the first to take a bite and immediately spit it out. “Don’t touch it! It’s poison!”

The Dwarves dropped the food. Bella took Óin’s cram, bit into the waybread, and spit it out. “It’s wolfsbane!”

“Even I know not to eat that,” Kíli said.

Bella looked unusually pale and her body began to shake. “They... Bard said... Bard didn’t know. I saw his son eat some. He couldn’t have...”

“Didn’t you say the Master’s assistant was there as well?” Thorin said.

Bella nodded. Bofur went over to comfort her. “Lass, you didn’t...”

“They tried to kill you,” Bella said in an unusually quiet voice.

“If they wanted to kill us, they could have used something with a less distinct taste than wolfsbane. They wanted to starve us out,” Óin said.

“Mother always said ‘Belladonna, you are never to poison anything, not even a rat, because it’s a terrible thing to do to any living creature’,” Bella said.

“I have to agree with Baggins on this,” Thorin said, “They could have given us rancid food if they wanted to starve us.”

Bella slammed her fists against the dining table so hard she broke it in half. “They tried to kill you!”

“Dori, I think she could give you a run for your money,” Nori said.

“Um, Bella, what’s happening to your arms?” Bofur said.

The Dwarves looked and saw scales covering Bella’s hands and arms. More began appearing on her throat and face. She looked down and her eyes widened in fear.

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered. The Hobbit ran out of the room.

“We have to get her. Something is wrong,” Bofur said.

The Dwarves gathered what weapons they could as they began to chase the Hobbit. Immediately outside the kitchen they found the mithril shirt and the small sword she carried with her. Each time they rounded a corner as they followed Bella, she seemed less and less like the Hobbit they knew.

When they were two-thirds of the way to the treasury, they found Bella's clothes shredded and deep scratch marks on the floor. "Smaug!" Bofur said.

"No, I don't think that's it," Balin said.

There was a roar ahead of them. "Then explain that!" Dwalin said.

The further into the mountain they went, the more destruction there was both by claw and flame. The treasury doors had been destroyed by the beast. The Dwarves could hear it howling.

"THEY TRIED TO TAKE THEM AWAY! THEY TRIED TO TAKE AWAY MY DWARVES!" the dragon screamed.

Thorin motioned for the group to spread out across the treasury and remain hidden as best as they could.

"THOSE SONS OF MAGGOTS! FILTHY, CURSED MORTAL MEN! THEY SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN CREATED! SUCH A PATHETIC RACE!" The dragon paced up and down the treasury. "I'LL KILL THEM ALL! I'LL MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF THEM! HOW DARE THEY TOUCH MY DWARVES!"

"It's not Smaug," said some of the Dwarves. It was golden from horn to tail. No flaw was to be found in its scales. Most terrifying of all, it was even bigger than Smaug.

“THOSE MISERABLE CUP-TRADING LAKEMEN! THOSE SNIVELING COWARDS WITH THEIR LONGBOWS AND BLACK ARROWS! THEY THINK THAT JUST BECAUSE THEY’RE BIGGER THAN EVERYONE ELSE IT MEANS THEY CAN TAKE WHATEVER THEY WANT!”

Thorin closed his eyes as realization dawned upon him.
“It’s not Smaug.”

Frerin hissed, “Of course it isn’t!”

“No, you don’t understand,” Thorin said. He stepped out into open view to the horror of the other Dwarves.

The dragon leaped in front of Thorin and roared. Thorin closed his eyes from the rush of air, but did not flinch. “And what have the children of the Lakemen done to you, you... witless worm!”

The dragon roared again. “I’M NOT THE ONE WHO JUMPED IN FRONT OF A FIRE-BREATHING DRAGON YOU MAJESTIC IDIOT!”

The other Dwarves ran to defend their king. Thorin hissed, “You slow, scrawny slug. A real dragon would have already devoured me! I demand you answer me! What have the Men of the Lake done to you?”

“YOU’RE MY DWARVES! THEY WANT TO TAKE AWAY MY DWARVES!” The dragon gave a final roar. “THEY CAN’T TAKE YOU AWAY! I’LL TEAR DOWN THEIR WALLS! I’LL BURN DOWN THEIR FORESTS! I’LL SEARCH EVERY CAVE AND DEVOUR THEM ALL! THEY WILL NEVER EVER HURT MY DWARVES EVER AGAIN!”

The dragon collapsed, its voice growing softer as it spoke.
“Thorin, I’ll kill them however you want me to. I’ll bring the

Elf king back alive if you want to kill him yourself. Please don't send me away." It curled up in a tight ball. "Please don't leave me alone again."

The dragon become smaller and smaller. Its scales shrank or disappeared to reveal freckled skin and golden hair.

Bella covered herself as best as she could. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Bifur took off his cloak and laid it across Bella.

Bofur knelt next to her. "There, there lass. We're here. No one is going to harm you."

"I'm so sorry," she whimpered, "Is anyone hurt?"

"Every Dwarf is here and unharmed," Balin said, "Our Hobbit on the other hand..."

"I'm not a Hobbit. I haven't been a Hobbit for a long time," Bella said. She pulled the cloak over herself as best as she could as she got to her knees. She kept her head bowed as Thorin walked to her.

"What are you?" Thorin asked.

"I'm the monster parents tell their children about at night. I've... I've killed," Bella said.

"How often does this happen?" Frerin asked.

Bofur tried to put his hand on Bella's shoulder, but she shuddered away from his touch. "Only when I'm scared or possessive. I really thought I would turn the night we first met." She looked up at Thorin and smiled. "A few days before we were introduced, I saw Orcrist up close for the

first time and realized that there was a dragon tooth in the handle. A dragon slayer, after all these years. Someone could finally end my misery.”

“Bella...” Thorin said softly.

She shook her head and continued smiling. “Thorin Oakenshield, King Under the Mountain, would you please protect your people, slay the dragon, and end my suffering?” Bella pushed aside the hair that was covering her neck. “It shouldn’t take long. I have a little neck.” A giggle of hysterical laughter leaked out and she covered her mouth. “I have become quite morbid, haven’t I?”

Thorin said quietly, “You want me to kill you.”

“I want you to slay the dragon. I’m not... I’m not worth saving. Please do your duty,” Bella said.

Bella closed her eyes and waited for the blow to come. Cold steel. Warmth from the raising of the blade. A whoosh of air. She waited for anything to come.

Anything except an embrace.

Thorin wrapped his arms around Bella and she began to struggle. “No. Please no. Don’t offer me kindness. No. Please. I deserve to die.”

“You have never been more wrong in all your life. Those are lies, Bella Baggins. You saved my kin, gave honor to my people who were killed by Smaug, rebuilt my home, and cared for my Company. You do not deserve to die,” Thorin said.

“I deserve this cur...”

"You never deserved this, Bella. You never ever deserved this life."

"I was a terrible person..."

"Anyone who would sacrifice themselves as you did is not terrible."

"I don't want to hurt..."

"You won't. You have been the Guardian of Erebor for so long you could never harm any of its residents. That's why you ran from us. You knew you were going to change."

When Bella nodded, Thorin kissed the top of her head.

"Would I allow a dragon to live?"

Bella shook her head.

"You are not a dragon, Bella. You are a Hobbit and something terrible was done to you. Will you tell me? Will you tell us? Maybe we can do something."

"You can't," she said softly.

"Why not?"

"Because I'll be dead by the Mortal Men's new year and it is because of the life I took."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Next chapter: how Bella ended up in service to Smaug.

Chapter XI: The Sacrifice

Chapter Summary

In which Bella stands up to Smaug (because she is both stupid and brave).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear. — Ambrose Redmoon

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4 Halimath 1170 (26 August 2770 of the Third Age)

Bella made her way to the Hobbiton market with a basket in one hand and her walking stick in the other. She was due to meet with her best friend Lobelia sometime before elevensies. Bella had decided to take a brief walk around the hills in the Shire, her energy unusually high that morning.

Lobelia stood by a booth selling Old Toby. Bella inhaled deeply the scent that reminded her of her father and mother before hugging her friend.

“You look so well, Lobelia,” Bella said.

“Yes. The little one is also quite active,” Lobelia said as she pulled away and rubbed her large stomach.

The two began walking around the market. Bella shifted her basket and walking stick to one arm and said, "Did you see that cloth that came from Bree?"

"I know! Russet orange, mustard yellow, violet purple, and manure brown in that awful paisley pattern. An utter travesty," Lobelia said.

"I wouldn't even use it for rags," Bella said.

"Oh, dear Bella," Lobelia said as the two stopped walking. She pulled out a cotton handkerchief from her skirt pocket. "You left this at my home last time we had tea."

Bella took the handkerchief and squeezed her friend's arm. "Thank you, Lobelia. I don't know what I would do without my..."

A shower of fire fell from the sky. Bella shoved Lobelia out of the way as a stall fell over from the force of the wind that appeared at almost the same moment.

"What's happening?" Lobelia shouted as the wind swirled around them.

Before Bella could respond, there was a roar that made Bella's ears ring. A dragon flew close to the ground and snapped at the Hobbits that ran towards the river. The dragon smashed the bridge with its tail before flying towards the fleeing Hobbits.

"Run, Lobelia!" Bella said. She dropped her basket and ran towards the dragon.

Later, Bella would say it was due to stupidity and not bravery that she ran towards the dragon. Her mother had always told her that bravery was doing something even

though you were scared and stupidity was doing something you knew would fail. In this case, it was both.

Bella smacked the dragon's tail with her walking stick. "HEY! YOU! FIRE STARTER! WHY DON'T YOU PICK ON SOMEONE YOUR OWN SIZE?"

The Hobbit barely dodged the dragon's tail as it turned around. She crouched low to the ground and held out her walking stick like a spear. "This is entirely uncivilized! Leave this place!"

The dragon laughed. "And why should I listen to a hairless rat like you?"

Bella saw that some of the Hobbits were able to escape the area. She returned her attention to the dragon. "Excuse you! I have perfectly normal amounts of hair on my head and feet as well as being excellently groomed! You have no room to talk about hair, worm!"

The dragon blew a breath of flame just behind Bella; she fell to the ground to avoid it. The dragon caged her with one of his giant claws that was attached to his wing. "Do you think bravery will save you?"

"No," Bella said. She relaxed into the ground. She waited for the death blow.

"Or that it will save your people? I will hunt each of them down. I have never seen creatures like you before. You smell..." the dragon licked her, his saliva stinging her skin, "... delicious."

"LEAVE THEM ALONE! WE DON'T HAVE TREASURE! WE MEAN NOTHING TO A DRAGON!" Bella shouted.

“That’s too bad. I might have let them live if they had a purpose. Why do you think any miserable Dwarves, Elves, or even Men still live? They are useful,” the dragon said.

“We’re useful! We grow things!”

The dragon shrugged. “Worthless to a carnivore.”

Bella wracked her brain for anything Hobbits did that could be worthwhile to a dragon. “Um... I can fix rocks?”

“Fix... rocks?” the dragon said skeptically.

“Yes! I can fix things that don’t live!” Bella said.

“Show me,” the dragon growled as he released Bella from his grip.

Bella crawled over to a piece of stone that had broken in half. After dropping her walking stick and touching the stone, she tried to clear her mind and focus on making the stone whole again and not think about the monster breathing his hot breath against her back. Bella imagined that her father was there next to her, reassuring his daughter that these things took time and should not be rushed. She sensed the stone knit itself together again. When the Hobbit opened her eyes, she held up the repaired stone up to the dragon.

“Interesting,” the dragon said, “All your people can do that?”

“Not all,” Bella said. Her people could either help living things grow or repair things that never lived. The first was useful, the second somewhat so.

The dragon sniffed her. “You are a virgin?”

Bella huffed. "Excuse you, that is none of your business."

His chest began to glow. "Answer me. Have you had the opportunity to bear children?"

"No, I have not though I do not see how anyone in polite society would ask that," Bella said. The quickly shrinking sane part of her was shouting that one should not argue with a dragon, even over manners.

"Good. A maiden. It is much easier to tear out one woman's womb than burn down an entire village if you decide to procreate. I could use a servant to clear up the mess the Filth will leave behind in my hoard," the dragon said.

Bella laughed hysterically for a moment before calming herself. "Dragons don't have servants."

"We have... exceptions," the dragon said.

"And why should I go with you?" Bella said.

The dragon considered for a moment. "I will not continue to destroy your home."

Bella added, "And you can't come back!"

"Why can't I?" the dragon said as he knocked Bella down again.

"Because... because... because I won't ever run away! I'll always stay with you!"

"Petty promises. Promise you will never kill yourself, upon the life of your people," the dragon said.

"I... I promise I will never run away or kill myself upon your promise never to return to the Shire and harm its people. I

shall do whatever you wish that is within my power to do so," Bella said.

"We have an accord," the dragon said.

"Wait!" Lobelia shouted. She ran towards the dragon, stopping a few feet from the beast. She threw down a bundled up blanket. Inside was all of the silver Lobelia and Bella owned and the gold frames that held the pictures of Bella's parents. "This is all of the treasure we have! Please leave us alone!"

"The deal has already been made," the dragon said.

He began to move towards Lobelia, but Bella stood up. "Stop! I'll grab the treasure for you and then we'll leave!"

The dragon huffed, "Now, creature."

Bella gathered up the fallen items. "I love you, Lobelia. Please keep safe."

"I will, Bella. Always remember that we love you, no matter what happens," Lobelia said.

Bella nodded. The dragon grabbed her with one of his lower claws before flying away from the Shire.

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When they finally landed, Bella Baggins had no idea where they were save that it was near a cave. Mist had settled over the landscape. The dragon dropped Bella on the ground before landing.

There was a blur of red before pain blossomed across Bella's neck. When she touched her throat, she felt what

she could only assume was blood.

“I will have to train you,” the dragon said. He licked his claw. “I will make you like me.”

Bella collapsed to the ground, unable to breath. She felt too hot and her lungs burned from some unknown fire. No screams came from her as the pain went beyond her comprehension.

“I’ve never tasted your kind before. I look forward to the day you break your word and I can go back for a feast,” the dragon said.

The pain stopped. Something was different, though Bella did not realize it. She could only speak in a whisper, her throat raw. “Never.”

The dragon trailed one claw against Bella’s now scaly skin. “That’s what they always say.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Ah, yes, angst.

Chapter XII: One Problem for Another

Chapter Summary

In which Bella reveals the Curse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

If one wishes to obtain something, something of equal value must be given. - The Law of Equivalent Exchange from the introduction of *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*

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Bella wiped her tears away. "You know the... the rest. If I am scared or angry, I change. These scales are from injuries that have not healed completely."

Thorin gently placed his hand at the back of Bella's neck. "Why did you save my siblings?"

Bella looked up at Thorin in confusion. "Why would I not save them? I didn't want anyone to die. I couldn't stop Smaug from destroying Erebor, but I could save two children. Who wouldn't try to save them? I mean, I didn't know if the scales would work. I had guessed that Smaug relied on smell to keep track of me most of the time, but I couldn't be sure." Bella's voice shook from anger instead of sorrow. "I was sick of watching people die! I couldn't just sit back and continue being indifferent! I wouldn't let anyone else get killed! Not when I could protect them!" She hid her face again.

"How did Smaug die?" Thorin asked quietly.

Bella sighed. "Isn't it obvious? I thought I could wait him out. I've lived twice as long as any Hobbit before. I thought I could outlast him. Wait for him to die. He had not called me in almost 60 years and yet he still lived. I knew if... I never promised to not kill him. When it was my birthday... Hobbits don't receive gifts, we give them. I thought I could give everyone the gift of not having to live with the dragon. It wasn't really altruism. I was tired... so tired, dear Dwarf. I always feared that he would wake up and hurt me again. The thought of others was negligible. I just wanted him to stop it.

"So, the day before the Mortal Men's New Year, I took the black arrow I had stolen from Bard and shoved it into Smaug's one weak spot. He awoke and I changed. It wasn't even a fight. I simply ripped through his scales. He cursed me and then I ripped out his throat because of how angry I was. Entirely unnecessary." She squinted and looked up at the ceiling. "It wasn't that satisfying, killing him. I thought it would be. I fantasized about it almost as much as I dreamed about being rescued." Bella fell silent and rested her head against Thorin's chest.

"And Gandalf knew?" Balin said.

Bella nodded. "I told him after I showed you Smaug's corpse. He told me he would try to save me, but I know it's worthless." She tightened her grip on her cloak. "Smaug always knew I loved fairy stories. We talked about them, sometimes, when he was in a gloating mood. He didn't like stories about Dwarves. Threw me against the wall when I told him the Line of Durin had survived the Battle of Azanulbizar. I didn't wake up for two days. He liked stories about dragons and people falling into gold sickness.

“Smaug told me that I would die in a year and a day in dragon form unless I could hold hope in my hands before my true love kissed me,” Bella began to cry again. “It’s impossible. I don’t want to die a monster.”

Thorin stroked her unbound hair and tried to reassure her that the wizard would find a way, though he himself did not know if it was possible to break a dragon’s curse.

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Dwalin had given Bella his outer tunic as it would work as a dress for her until they could get her proper clothes. Bofur refused to leave Bella’s side after she had changed into Dwalin’s tunic.

“Lass, I’ve met worse folk than an overgrown lizard,” Bofur said cheerfully.

Bella smiled genuinely, but refused to be touched after Thorin had gone a few yards away to speak with the rest of the Dwarves. Bofur’s decision was quite clear about the matters being discussed.

“I don’t know if the wizard can save her,” Balin said.

“And what she will do before he comes back. What if she changes again?” Glóin said.

“She won’t attack us,” Thorin said.

“You can’t know that,” Dori said.

“Did you not listen to a word she said? It was *her* Dwarves she feared for. Not treasure. Not herself. It was *us*,” Thorin said.

They looked over at the Hobbit as she listened to Bofur play his flute. The Dwarves looked back at Thorin.

“So... Hobbit dragons... hoard Dwarves?” Fíli said.

Thorin shrugged. “Bella does. She gave up all of the possessions she valued to protect us both from attack and starvation. Maybe Smaug hoped he would have another dragon on his side, but he did not expect Hobbits to be so uninterested in treasure. In all my dealings with the Shire, I never saw anyone wear jewels. Silver was the finest metal they asked for, and only for serving food.”

“We don’t know how dragons reproduce, so that is possible,” Balin said.

“Dragons torture people and turn them into dragons?” Kíli said.

“Orcs were once Elves before the first Dark Lord corrupted them,” Ori said softly.

“That’s... well...” Dis stroked her beard, “I understand that, but it doesn’t make her less dangerous.”

“I am not denying that,” Thorin said.

“Mother always said love was a vicious motivator,” Dori said.

“Still doesn’t leave us with an answer,” Nori said.

“There may not be one yet,” Thorin said.

“What are we to do then?” Óin said.

Frerin glanced over at Bella and then his brother. “We test her.”

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"You're leaving?" Bella asked quietly the next day.

"Yes. We have to hunt to get more food," Thorin said.

"What about the Elves? Won't they dislike you hunting in their forest?" Bella said.

"Not all of it is theirs. The Men of the Lake are allowed to use some of it, and we will as well," Thorin said.

"For how long?"

"As long as we need," Frerin said.

Thorin placed his hand behind Bella's neck and rested his forehead against hers. "I will come back as soon as I can."

Bella put Thranduil's necklace in Thorin's pocket. "In case you run into the Elves. I don't want you to be shot just because you didn't have this silly trinket."

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"We will spend three days out here at the most," Thorin said when they made camp that night.

"I don't think that's wise, Thorin. We should find a place to wait for Gandalf to come back if not Dain," Balin said.

"What is taking that wizard so long?" Óin grumbled.

"I won't leave her alone in there for more than three days," Thorin said.

"I am not letting you go back there, Thorin, unless we have some surety that she will not harm you," Dwalin said.

"She won't," Thorin said.

"Oh for the love of... Thorin, just because someone is your One doesn't mean they won't ever hurt you. If love was a cure-all, Grandfather would have never gone mad," Frerin snapped.

Thorin gritted his teeth and said nothing as he waited for the onslaught of questions... which did not come. "You all knew?"

"You were... nice. You're never nice. Polite at times, but never nice," Bifur said.

"It's true. You are a giant bag of grumpiness," Bofur said.

Thorin glared, but did not give Bofur a response. He addressed the rest of the Company. "My belief that we should not leave her alone for long is from her actions, not because of me." He took his pipe out of his pocket, his hand brushing against the necklace Bella had made sure he had on his person. "And I am nice."

When everyone in the camp burst out laughing, Thorin truly did not understand what they found amusing.

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It took four days to get back to Erebor as they had to avoid a patrol of Lakemen for half a day. When they returned, the mountain was silent. Bella was not to be found in her now animal-less garden, the royal suites, or the library. As they began to worry, Bella appeared from the direction of the treasury.

The Hobbit blinked rapidly and tried to make noise, but no sound came out. Thorin went up to her. "We were able to

flush out some rabbits and Kíli was able to kill a stag. We avoided some Lakemen. Óin might have some..."

Bella hugged Thorin tightly, still saying nothing. Thorin carefully put his arms around her. "I told you I would come back, Burglar."

"You dear Dwarf. I didn't...you didn't have to..."

"I said I would," Thorin said.

"That is really..."

A raven swooped in and crowed, "Scouts from Dain are at the gate."

"NOW they show up?" Dwalin growled.

"Pay up," Nori hissed at Óin.

"Pay up for what?" Bella asked.

The Company suddenly became busy with preparing for the arrival of the scouts. Bella said, "I will prepare something with what we have left. Tell Dain's scouts whatever you wish." She smiled at Thorin and gently touched his arm. "Thank you."

Thorin gave her a small smile that made Bella feel warm all over as he squeezed her hand. "I am glad to see you are still here, Burglar."

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There were seven amongst the new Dwarrow, including one most unexpected. "COUSIN!" Dain said when he saw Thorin.

“Dain!” Thorin said. The two butted heads and hugged in greeting. “Cousin, I never expected you to be in the scouting party.”

“I have left you waiting long enough and my men are two days march behind us. I will return to them tomorrow if you will let us rest in your kingdom,” Dain said.

“Of course,” Thorin said, genuinely smiling, “You are quite welcome, Dain.”

The Lord of the Iron Hills looked around him in awe. “I did not expect it to be in such good condition. Less gold, but it is almost like when I visited it as a child.”

“We have had a bit of help. Come, I have much to tell you,” Thorin said.

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Bella nearly cut herself several times from her hands shaking as she skinned the rabbits. She had given up hope that the Company would return. They had left her enough food for a meal a day until the New Year and they had taken many weapons with them. To not be alone again, to know that Thorin kept his word...

Deep laughter in the hallway alerted Bella to the presence of the scouts and her, no, Thorin’s Dwarves. She wished her hands were not in the middle of gutting rabbits, but there was nothing to be done about it, so she went back to work.

“Is this the lass who guarded Erebor then?” a cheerful, booming voice said.

“Aye, this is Lady Baggins,” Thorin said.

"I am sorry, but my hands are a bit of the mess at the moment," Bella said without turning. She felt suddenly shy and embarrassed. No one had seen her without her skin covered in some way besides the Company since Erebor had fallen.

"Well, Lady Baggins, you have my deepest thanks. When you are done preparing that, we'll have a proper introduction, aye?" the cheerful voice said.

"Of course," Bella said as she glanced at the new voice out of the corner of her eye. He looked a bit like Balin from the shape of his face, but dressed more like Dwalin and Thorin. He had a great red beard which was of similar coloring to Glóin's hair.

"We'll be in the common room," Thorin said as the others left and he leaned against the counter.

"Thank you," Bella said.

He spoke in a whisper, "I told them the first tale you told us. Come only if you wish to."

"Would it be better for the Company if I came?" Bella asked.

Thorin sighed and nodded. "They wish to see the Shire girl who lived with a dragon all these years."

Bella nodded. "They don't know about my knack?"

"Not as you have told us. I attributed it to the dragon," Thorin said.

Bella looked over at Thorin. "Truly, thank you, dear Dwarf."

He bowed his head. "I am at your service, Bella Baggins."
His arm and shoulder brushed against hers as he left.

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Thorin watched as Bella made herself busy with serving the Dwarves and making herself as friendly as possible. The last of the tea made an appearance as did some toasted cram brought by Dain. With the last bit of preserves, it was almost an afternoon tea, which seemed to make things a bit more civilized despite the vast array of weapons at the table.

"Cousin, I am glad to hear the mountain is reclaimed and that I could come to you, but I fear I bring you ill news," Dain said.

The king nodded to his cousin. Dain sighed. "As you know, we were delayed due to a siege from Orcs. They left us a few days ago and we found out why. The Great Goblin of the Misty Mountains was killed and now an armed force combining the armies of the Misty Mountains and from Gundabad march to Erebor to 'avenge' their fallen."

"Why would Gundabad Orcs help?" Thorin said.

"Bolg son of Azog is among them," Dain stated.

The Dwarves all groaned. It was ill news indeed to hear that Bolg still wished to avenge his father's death.

"I have five hundred Dwarves with me, cousin," Dain said, "We have enough food for several months and reinforcements should be coming at the latest by spring."

"What of Laketown?" Bella asked.

Dain's Dwarves looked at Bella quizzically. The Lord of the Iron Hills said, "What of Laketown?"

"Would the Orcs attack Laketown?" Bella asked.

"Possibly. However, Laketown could destroy its bridge to the mainland and wait for the Orcs to pass them by," Dain said.

"Do not give me possibility," Bella snapped, "Laketown is not made up of soldiers. They may have fifty guards and bowmen at most. If they were attacked and took every able-bodied person able to wield a sword, maybe two hundred. Erebor could..."

"Were these not the same people who tried to poison you?" one of the scouts asked.

Bella huffed. "That was because of a greedy man. The citizens of Laketown had nothing to do with it. The descendants of the Lord of Dale are among them. Surely you would not wish to lose an old ally of Erebor? Mortal Men often scoff at Dwarves; Dale did not. They helped Erebor with trade relations and made this place better than the Dwarves ever could on their own. Am I dealing with Petty Dwarves or benevolent ones?"

One of the scouts said something in Khuzdul. Bella only understood enough to know he said 'dragon' and 'female'. Whatever else was said caused anger to be stirred among the Company. Bifur and Bofur knocked the scout to the floor. The other scouts joined in and then most of the rest of the Company. Óin, Bombur, Balin, Thorin, Frerin, Dis. and Dain watched the proceedings with mild interest. Bella stepped over to Thorin's side, flinching at the chaos before them.

“Shouldn’t you break them up?” Bella asked.

Thorin shrugged. “They’ll sort it out. Lady Baggins, you should probably check on dinner.”

“What of Laketown?” Bella asked.

Thorin sighed and leaned over to Balin and Dain and spoke to them for a moment. Fíli yipped in pain loud enough that Frerin dragged his nephew away from the fight. Thorin turned back to Bella. “We will send a raven to Bard and tell him of the Orcs. We will offer them refuge in the mountain. Dain’s men should be here before then and Erebor will be secure enough to have them.”

Bella nodded and squeeze Thorin’s shoulder. “Thank you, Thorin. I know I... I said things the other day about them, but I truly do not want them to die.”

Thorin put his hand over Bella’s for a moment. “I know and I have no desire to turn away those in need like we once were.”

Bella squeezed his shoulder again before leaving to make sure the stew had not burned. Dain chuckled and shook his head.

“What?” Thorin said.

“Nothing. Just remembering what my Father would always say to us young ones,” Dain said.

“And what’s that, cousin?” Thorin said.

“Get yourself a wife.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Yes, this version of Thorin really does think he is nice. After all, he hasn't thrown Frerin off a cliff for being an annoying little brother... yet. Also, a little *Fullmetal Alchemist* reference was thrown in here besides the chapter quote.

Chapter XIII: How Can the World Want Me to Change?

Chapter Summary

In which Bella is self-conscious and Thorin's favorite people show up... again!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They can't tell me who to be/'Cause I'm not what they see/Yeah, the world is still sleepin' while I keep on dreaming for me/And their words are just whispers and lies that I'll never believe - "I'm Still Here (Jim's Theme)" by John Rzeznik, theme song for the movie *Treasure Planet*

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

"I just realized I didn't slap your cousin for making you wait," Bella said as they watched the scouts leave Erebor from the top of the gates the following morning.

"Well, you will have the opportunity on future occasions," Thorin said.

She touched the corner of his sleeve. "I repaired the damage I made when I was a dragon. I am going to start preparing rooms for the citizens of Laketown, with your permission."

"Of course. Those not checking the armory shall assist you," Thorin said. He wanted to grab her hand and keep her close instead of sending her away.

Bella nodded her head. "Your majesty."

"Burglar."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Dain's men arrived by the end of their second day's march. The Dwarves were put to their stations and given a brief tour of the city. Most tried to spot the Hobbit both because of her association with the dragon and being a Halfling.

"You're going to have to come out sometime," Dis said gently through the door to Bella's room.

"I am quite alright up here. I have everything ready for the Men of the Lake and their families and I can continue cooking for the Company. Nobody needs to see me," Bella said.

"Bella, please," Dis said.

"Not today. No thank you. I shall consider it tomorrow," Bella said.

A few minutes later, there was another knock on Bella's door and some muttering in Khuzdul. She cracked the door open and saw Bifur looking quite agitated with Bofur close by. Bella opened the door further. "What's wrong Bifur?"

Bifur growled in Khuzdul and signed a few words that Bella could only roughly translate. Bofur said, "My cousin wanted to tell you that 'We Dwarves don't care what the rock looks like on the outside, but beneath the surface where the gold and gems are.' It's a bit prettier of a saying in Khuzdul. Anyway, he said 'You shouldn't feel shame from your looks or your actions, as he quite likes you and he doesn't like most folk. Besides, nobody ever laughed of the ax in his

head. Sure, some got scared, but more because they were worried he was hurt then if he would hurt them.’”

Bella smiled at Bifur. “You are a sweetheart, you are.”

Bifur smiled back and placed his head against Bella’s carefully so it would not jolt the ax in his head. It was a familial sign of affection, and Bella was not at all uncomfortable with it, unlike other times such physical acts given to her normally did.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin was certain that whoever was in charge of his fate truly wanted to make him miserable as the Elves arrived at the same time the Men of the Lake did. “Well, isn’t that convenient,” Dwalin said dryly as the two of them watched the army of Elves and the small group of Mortal Men stood before the gate.

“I wonder if they asked for an escort,” Thorin said.

“Not in five days’ time,” Bella’s voice said.

Thorin looked around him before looking down to find Bella crouched between him and Dwalin. “Hobbit, are you ill?”

“No need for them to know I’m here. Can you see Bard? He may be traveling with his two daughters and son if he is not leading the group. That is not all of the residents of Laketown,” Bella said.

Kíli peered out at the Men. “There seem to be about... four hundred?”

“Laketown has at least five hundred if not six hundred,” Bella said as she tapped her fingers against the stone floor.

"Your Mr. Bard seems to have made friends with the Elf King," Thorin growled.

"I don't doubt it. Bard is not an idiot and knows he will need good relations with the Woodland Realm if Dale is to be rebuilt. If everyone is not here, that means the Master and part of the residents are still in Laketown, an obvious split in the group," Bella said.

Thorin growled and Bella gently tugged at his sleeve. "Dear Dwarf, just because someone is friends with someone else does not mean that they will not be friends with you."

"Hail Thorin, King Under the Mountain!" Bard said when he neared the gate.

"I do not recall my missive including the Elves as well when I sent a raven to you. I only recall offering protection to the Men of the Lake," Thorin said.

"It was a chance meeting," Thranduil said.

Bella gently touched Thorin's leg before he could snark back an answer. He took a deep breath before answering. "King Thranduil, if it is the necklace you seek, I have it prepared for you and will have a messenger fetch it for us now, if you will be willing to wait."

The Elven King said nothing for several seconds, the only thing revealing his surprise. "I thank you, Thorin son of Thráin."

A brown horse with a rider dressed in grey came galloping by the ranks of the Elves before the moment could become even more awkward. A small man covered in cloaks and blankets clung to the grey rider.

“Mithrandir!” Thranduil said.

“Gandalf! You have returned!” Thorin said.

The wizard nodded to Thranduil, Bard, and Thorin as he caught his breath. “I was delayed. Someone fancied himself a necromancer and it had to be dealt with immediately along with the task I set out on. Along the way, I found something unexpected. I will have need of your healers, King Thranduil, for a prisoner I found in the necromancer’s dungeon. Thorin, I request shelter for this man.”

“A friend of yours?” Thorin asked.

“And of Erebor,” Gandalf said.

Before Thorin could answer, Bella said, “If he really was a prisoner, you should show kindness and let him in.”

“I was already going to do that, but after Thranduil left,” Thorin whispered.

“No, do it now. It’s snowing, Thorin. Both the prisoner and the Lakemen must be freezing. There are babies out there. They could get sick,” Bella said.

“But Thranduil may use that opportunity to attack...”

“Not with Gandalf there. The Elves hold him in high esteem including Thranduil. Not to mention Thranduil would be murdering children if he attacked Erebor while you opened the gate. It is bad news for him. If you let them in now, you are showing faith in old alliances. A thousand archers would be useful when the Orcs arrive tomorrow.”

“But allowing Elves in?”

“Óin is the only Dwarf healer here trained beyond battle wounds. As much as I trust him, it would be better to have more hands. Besides, if Thranduil tries anything, you could hold them prisoner.”

Thorin nodded. “Fair council. Dwalin?”

“The Hobbit is right on the attack part. The two groups are too close for the civilians to be unharmed in a fight,” Dwalin said.

Thorin spoke to those who stood before the gate. “Gandalf, I shall allow you, your friend, and the Men of the Lake to enter as well as any healers King Thranduil sends to help.”

Thranduil seemed displeased by the use of some of his army, but nodded graciously. Bard showed obvious relief. Gandalf was far too pleased with everything.

“Open the gate,” Thorin ordered.

As the doors swung open, Bella tugged at Thorin’s coat again. “You did well, dear Dwarf.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Gandalf had been permitted to ride his horse to the healing house established near the entrance of Erebor. Due to design of Erebor, those of the Company at the gate reached the house before Gandalf did. The former prisoner was wrapped warmly yet still shivered violently. Óin exited the building and looked at the wizard with exasperation.

“What do we have now?” Óin said.

“He was a prisoner of a man who dabbled in witchcraft,” Gandalf said, “The Dwarf with me has suffered great pains

to his mind as well as his body.”

Óin squinted behind Gandalf. “And the Elves? Glóin told me.”

“To assist you with both him and the upcoming battle,” Gandalf said.

“They better not mess with my things,” Óin grumbled.

“Ah, Frerin, Dis, help the man off, if you would be so kind,” Gandalf said.

The two siblings looked at each other with wariness before going to help. “What’s your name, sir?” Frerin asked.

“Don’t annoy the man before he even has a chance to breathe,” Dis said.

The man was hunched over as he dismounted the horse clumsily. He had wrinkled, cracked hands and a tangled beard.

“Welcome to Erebor,” Thorin said.

The man looked up and whispered, “Thorin?”

The King Under the Mountain did not faint. Thorin, however, did when he saw his father for the first time in a hundred years.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella shook Thorin awake “Dear Dwarf, you must wake up. The Elves are coming.”

Thorin sat up and pulled Bella behind him as he drew a dagger. “*Elves! Where?*” he growled in Khuzdul.

Bella made soothing noises as she patted his back. "It's alright. They won't hurt you. They are here to help."

Thorin huffed and put away his dagger. His hands began to shake. "Burglar, did I dream or was it real?"

"Yes, it was real," Bella said, "Your father is alive and waiting for you to see him in the healing house."

Thorin got to his knees before finding he could not go any further, all strength gone from him. Bella helped him to his feet and they began to walk to the house, her arms around his waist to offer support. Thorin slung an arm around Bella's shoulder. Gandalf stood by the door of the house, puffing away on his pipe.

"Did you know?" Thorin asked.

"Certainly not. I would have torn that old fortress down stone by stone if I knew," Gandalf said, "It seems this necromancer tried to use the Line of Durin's Ring to his advantage, but destroyed it in the process of trying to control it."

Thorin squeezed Bella's shoulders in a protective gesture. "What of Baggins?"

"There has been progress, but I cannot do this on my own. Others of my order will be here within a few days," Gandalf said.

Thorin growled, "Cutting it a bit close, aren't we?"

Gandalf stood up straighter. "A wizard is never late, nor is he early, he arrives precisely when he means to."

“Thorin, my problem can wait. Your father needs you now,” Bella said.

“Time is running out for you,” Thorin said gruffly.

“I will throw you in there if you do not go in now,” Bella said.

Gandalf nodded. Thorin resisted rolling his eyes at the wizard before continuing into the house of healing. Though Thorin found himself regaining his strength, he found he did not want let Bella go until he had to.

Frerin and Dis already were by Thráin’s side. Their father had a hand on each of their heads. Thorin took off his crown and placed it on a table by Thráin. Thorin went to his knees and rested his forehead against Thráin’s.

“Thorin, you’re safe,” Thráin said.

“We all are, yes,” Thorin said.

“Your... your Mother?” Thráin asked.

“Alive and waiting to return home to Erebor,” Thorin said.

Thráin sniffled as tears began to form. “Good. Very good, little wolf.”

Thorin felt many burdens lifted off his shoulders. No one called him “little wolf” save for his Father and Mother. Somehow, a warm, safe place had been restored to Thorin.

“Dear Dwarf, the Elves are coming. They will need to examine your Father,” Bella said. She placed her hand on Thorin’s upper back.

Thráin chuckled. “Thorin always liked a lass with freckles.”

Thorin groaned and hid his face. Of course his Father would find a way to embarrass him within five minutes of coming back from the dead.

Bella laughed. "And I can see where your children get their handsome looks from."

Thráin smirked and looked a bit like Frerin in that moment. "You are too kind, lass. You should see me when I clean up. I can make anyone swoon with my rugged good looks."

"Elves are here," Glóin said with a snarl.

Thráin tried to raise his head, but flinched in pain. "Why would the Elves be here?"

"They are here to assist you, Mr. Thráin," Bella said.

Thráin snorted. "Mister?"

"Sorry, your majesty. Hobbit manners are hard to break," Bella said.

The old Dwarf looked at her seriously. "Dear child, don't break anymore of yourself."

Before Bella could respond, three Elves entered the house, including a red-headed woman. Kíli brightened as if seeing some long lost treasure. "Captain Tauriel!"

The Elf gave a small smile that made the whole room feel like a warm autumn day. She nodded to the Dwarf prince before turning to Thorin. "King Thorin, King Thranduil has sent us to assist your healer, Master Óin."

"I am afraid you are wrong," Thorin said, "I am not the king. He is."

The Elves were obviously surprised by this. Captain Tauriel's surprise turned to joy. "That is wonderful. We shall take excellent care of him, Prince Thorin."

It was Thorin's turn to be surprised. The Elf seemed genuine in her congratulations. There was no mockery or derision in how she spoke or carried herself. Though like all Elves not to be trusted entirely, Thorin granted her request to examine and speak with Thráin only with the healers to offer the king some privacy.

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Frerin, Dis, and Thorin waited outside. Dis muttered, "I really hadn't thought..."

"Neither did I. Thorin did, though," Frerin said.

Thorin shook his head. "I gave up after Gandalf gave me the map and key."

"Father looks awful," Dis said.

"He actually looks good for going through..." Frerin shivered. "It could be worse. I think I heard Gandalf say something about healing him"

Thorin covered his mouth as he laughed. "Has he met Fíli and Kíli yet?"

"Not officially. I didn't want to overwhelm him," Dis said cautiously.

Thorin continued laughing, bending over and clutching his sides. "You weren't even of age when he left. He is going to be in quite a state to find out you've married and had

children, his baby girl. He always was more protective of you."

Dis gasped. "He might kill Víli if he thinks Víli hasn't taken care of me."

Bella came out of the house. "The Elves say Mr. Thráin will be fine."

All three of Thráin's children laughed at that. "*Mister* Thráin?"

"Old habits," Bella said with a sigh. She had a sly grin and looked at Thorin from the corner of her eye. "Freckles?"

Frerin fell to the ground with laughter. "Freckles," he wheezed.

Thorin covered his face with his hand. "You were not even *born* when I said that."

"I think it's sweet your Father worries about your happiness," Bella said.

"I did not mean to make you feel uncomfortable," Thorin said.

"Oh, I know. I wish it was the worst thing someone's parent has said to me. Do you wish to be even?" Bella said.

Thorin stood up straight. "Um... yes?"

"I like brunettes." Bella winked and began to walk away. "I assume you wish to speak to Bard. I will fetch him for you." She pulled her hood over her head and put her gloves on as she continued walking.

When Bella was out of earshot, Thorin made a small noise of confusion. Dis laughed. "What's wrong?"

"Was she flirting?" Thorin asked.

"Yes," Dis said.

"Are you sure? She could just be..."

"She winked. It was flirting," Frerin said.

"Are you sure she..."

Thorin's siblings said at the same time, "YES!"

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Bard made sure his children were settled before coming with Bella. They were silent until Bella said, "I am sorry I have lied to you over the years."

"I am guessing you have had to lie for a long time. How long have you been coming to Laketown?" Bard asked.

"Two years after Erebor fell I was permitted one week a year to leave the mountain to gather supplies," Bella said, "I paid everything back with interest, don't worry. No one starved because of me."

Bard said quietly, "He threatened to burn your home if you did not return?"

"Yes," Bella said.

"My Grandfather said sometimes a light would come from Erebor before the dragon came, giving the people time to hide from Smaug. That happened for generations before Smaug slept. That was you, wasn't it?"

Bella shrugged. "There are mirrors in the mountain. It only worked if he left at night or if he told me his plans. I am sorry I could not do more."

"I accept your apology and thank you for the service you have done to try to save my people," Bard said.

"There is really no need to thank..."

"There is," Bard said.

Bella tugged at Bard's coat sleeve so he would stop walking. She held out her right hand, needing him to know that she wanted to repair the damage she had done. "I would like to properly introduce myself. My name is Bella Baggins of the Shire."

Bard smiled slightly and shook her hand. "Bard of Laketown. A pleasure to meet you officially, Miss Baggins."

As they continued walking, Bard said, "My grandmother told me tales of Halflings from the Shire. Are you one?"

"Yes. Couldn't you tell by the feet?" Bella said.

"Well, my mother told me not to point out things that could get me slapped," Bard said.

Bella snickered and patted Bard's arm. "She raised you well."

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After fetching Bard for Thorin, Bella ran to find Bofur, who was showing some of Dain's men the forges. "Bofur, I need to talk to you as soon as you're free."

“Of course lass. Just finishing up here and then going to check up on how the Company is doing,” Bofur said.

When Bofur came over to Bella after the tour was finished, she yanked him down the hallway and back to the upper levels. “Bofur, I’ve done something wretched.”

“You didn’t stick nettles in someone’s blankets, did ya?” Bofur asked.

Bella groaned. “Worse. I... *flirted*.”

“Flirted? That’s what’s so terrible and has you all in a fuss?” Bofur said as he laughed.

Bella stopped by a doorway and collapsed to the floor in tears. Bofur was by her in an instant, an arm around her shoulder to comfort her. “Oh, lass. Tell your friend Bofur what’s the matter.”

“It’s wrong of me to do that. I haven’t flirted since... since I came of age. I used to like it, but some of the people I flirted with never really liked me, only my money so I stopped. I just felt young again and it was stupid of me. I’m not healthy and I don’t want to drag anyone into the mess that I am,” Bella said.

“Oh, lass. Did the person you flirted with understand you were just being playful?” Bofur said.

“I don’t know. I sort of ran away,” Bella said.

“That doesn’t sound like the brave Hobbit lass I know.”

Bella sighed and tucked a loose curl behind her ear. “Bofur, it was rude of me to do something that might imply more than I am willing or capable of doing.”

"It'll be fine lass. I'm sure they understood you were just being playful." They sat in silence for some time while Bofur rubbed the top of Bella's back. "Who *did* you flirt with?"

"...Thorin."

Bofur fell over laughing. Bella sniffled. "It's not funny."

"Oh, you don't know what I know lass. It really is," Bofur said as he attempted and failed to sit up.

Bella pulled her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around her legs. "He didn't ask me to flirt with him. I just wanted to cheer him up after Mr. Thráin embarrassed him."

Bofur froze. "Say that name again?"

Bella gasped. "I forgot you weren't there! Thráin's alive! Gandalf found him!"

Bofur pulled Bella to her feet. "Why didn't you lead with that?"

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin had been having, for a few brief moments, a very good day. They had avoided war with the Elves, his father was not dead, and Bella had *flirted* with him. (He realized the last was a somewhat smaller happiness in the grand scheme of things, but he did not personally feel that it was.) Now, however, he was sitting at a table with Dain, Bard, Gandalf, and (directly across from him) Thranduil. Balin had the nerve to remind Thorin that murder was not encouraged and was, in fact, illegal in most places.

Bella had been the one saving grace of the meeting. She had brought in tea and dinner. Thorin should not have been put so at ease just with her presence. That and she had made elk antlers behind Thranduil's head at one point. Frerin had pinched Thorin before he could laugh out loud.

The meeting of the Leaders of the Woodland Realm, Dale, the Iron Hills, and Erebor ended in no bloodshed and something of a plan. All that was left were final preparations.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Gandalf and Bella sat outside the council room as they waited for the leaders to finish their meeting, Gandalf said. "You have healed faster than I imagined."

"What are you talking about?" Bella said as she motioned to the scales on her face.

"You willingly gave touches of affection to several members of the Company and did not flinch when they did the same for you," Gandalf said.

"I had hardly noticed. I still don't like to be surprised and it's not as if... as if I can open up to them entirely. Not yet, though they know the truth now," Bella said.

"Trust takes time, even with those we love," Gandalf said, "Hobbits are quite resilient, I think. Though not made of stone like Dwarves, they are like plants. They can grow and change. They have the ability to survive drought and flood, over caring and under caring to the point of trampling them, and yet they still grow."

"You make us sound like extraordinary creatures," Bella said.

“Dear Hobbit, you certainly are,” Gandalf said.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Canon? What canon? To quote the Doctor, “JUST THIS ONCE, EVERYBODY LIVES!” For those who follow me on Tumblr, the extra chapter I was talking about was this one. Thráin was going to be dead until I saw the DOS EE.

That last scene was because I wanted to give a little explanation about why Bella could be recovering so quickly after being imprisoned for so many years. Also, if it is not clear, there is no One Ring in this universe. I think we have enough angst, yes?

Chapter XIV: Same Disease

Chapter Summary

Thorin and Gandalf worry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I'm a side show, isolate and torn/Only you can touch me/You alone/I'm immune to you/You are immune to me/We are both sick souls/With the same disease - From "Same Disease" by RED

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella had fallen asleep against Gandalf's shoulder when she heard a clear voice say, "Mithrandir, you left the meeting early."

"I did, Thranduil," Gandalf said, "You and the rest of the leaders hardly needed me to babysit you once you all realized how idiotic it would be to not work together."

Bella almost saw great Elf King roll his eyes. His attention turned towards her. "And what are you?"

"I don't see why it is any business of yours," Bella said as she rubbed her eyes to rid herself of weariness.

"It matters when I see a dragon's mark on you, Halfling," Thranduil said.

For a moment, Bella did not understand the remark. She had worn a head covering and gloves when she brought

food to the leaders. When she touched her head, she felt only curls. Her scarf had fallen off while she slept.

"I gave myself up to save my home. I have been here ever since," Bella said.

"I know a thing or two about dragons, Miss..."

The Hobbit did not feel like sharing her name with anyone. The only ones outside of the Company who knew were Dain, Dain's scouts, Gandalf, and Bard. "I am aware, sir, they do not take servants. I made myself useful such as, oh, cleaning out his teeth after he ate. Mostly Dwarves, goats, cows, though sometimes an Elf or two."

Thranduil nodded his head, neither annoyed nor angry. "Indeed. We lost three Elves to Smaug before his long sleep. Tell me, do you know how dragons are made?"

"No one knows, not even dragons," Bella said. It was a mostly true statement. Smaug did not know how Morgoth made the first dragons. Reproduction after that was the normal way, though sometimes Free Folk were turned in a long, painful process.

The Elf King said, "Indeed. There are fairy stories though. Some mention Free Folk being cursed by dragons."

Gandalf cleared his throat. "And here I thought fairies were what folk called Elves when they did not properly introduce themselves."

Bella smiled slightly. "Oh, so are you implying an Elf married a Took Hobbit?"

"Oh, I don't doubt it. It's not as uncommon for Free Folk to intermarry as some people would like to believe," Gandalf

said.

"A few Bree Hobbits have married the Mortal Men there," Bella said.

"Indeed they have. Mainly Elves and Men marry each other, but there was at least one Hobbit and Elf match. There is more than one Dwarf and Elf marriage on record, now that I think upon it," Gandalf said.

Bella was certain if Thranduil was even the slightest bit less of a king, he would have squawked at the comment. Gandalf was profoundly pleased.

"I must speak to my people to prepare for tomorrow," Thranduil said.

When Thranduil, his son (who gave a kind smile to Bella as he passed), and the rest of Thranduil's entourage had left, Bella felt tears come to her eyes. Gandalf offered her a handkerchief.

"I am quite alright," Bella said.

"Thranduil worries for his people, much as Thorin did when you first met," Gandalf said.

"Thorin should still worry. I could at any moment..."

"You will not, dear Hobbit," Gandalf said.

"I don't want them to be hurt. I want them to be safe. I love my Dwarves, Gandalf," Bella said.

"*Your* Dwarves? I suppose they are," Gandalf said.

Bella gasped and covered her mouth. "I can't think of them that way. It makes me... possessive."

Gandalf nodded. "Yes, Thorin told me of what happened with food while I was gone."

Bella nodded. "Please excuse me. I need to see the sky and feel like myself again. I need to remember where I belong."

"The stars do that, certainly."

"If you need to see me, I will be in the royal quarters with the rest of my, no, Thorin's Dwarves."

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"I would recommend you find the Hobbit," Gandalf said to Thorin once the Dwarf had left the meeting room.

"What's wrong?" Thorin asked.

Gandalf stood up and began to walk with Thorin. The Dwarf prince motioned for the others to fall back while he spoke to the wizard. "I ask again, what is wrong with Bella?"

"Bella, is it?" Gandalf said with amusement.

Thorin adjusted his coat. "She is a Dwarf-friend and she has asked us to call her by that name."

Gandalf smiled slightly. "Then it has gone better than I hoped."

"What has?" Thorin growled.

"Bella no longer wishes to die. She has told me of the love she has for your Company. That love will go farther than any magic to heal her," Gandalf said.

Thorin sighed. "If you say to me 'love cures all' I will..."

"It does not cure all," Gandalf said sternly, "Love is a choice that we cannot force upon others. Due to the evil in this world, that choice is often either taken or thrown away. Your Grandfather's sickness took away his choice. The reason for evil in this world was because one person decided that his wants were above others and tried to force others into loving him."

Thorin sighed. "What is wrong with the Hobbit?"

"She will try to fight for you tomorrow," Gandalf said.

"She doesn't know how to fight beyond basic defense," Thorin said.

Gandalf raised an eyebrow.

"She can't control herself in that form. She caused significant damage in Erebor and that was when she was trying not to harm anyone," Thorin said.

"This is why she must not go near that fight. Do what you must, but we cannot have a dragon enter that battle tomorrow," Gandalf said.

"I will speak with Óin," Thorin said.

Gandalf sighed. "Good. Good. Still see her. It will do you both good. She said she was going to see the stars."

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Thorin first spoke with Óin before searching for the Hobbit. He found her in the now bleak garden. Without a word, he sat next to Bella on the stone bench that faced the East. She continued looking out while she spoke to him. "Did you know flowers still grow here?"

“No, I did not. You brought seeds here from Laketown?” Thorin said.

“No. They were always here. They’re called snowdrops because they bloom in the snow sometimes, even as early as January. Whenever I saw them, I knew the cold was not to last forever.” Her voice became frantic. “I know Dwarves do not have a love of flowers like Hobbits, but please do not destroy them. They’re not weeds. Press them, put them in vases, make flower crowns, leave them be, but don’t destroy them. Promise me that.”

Thorin pulled her hand towards him and kissed it. “I promise.”

Bella closed her eyes and took several deep breaths. “Thank you.”

He kissed her hand again and kept his head bowed.

“I’m sorry Thorin. I didn’t mean to be a burden.”

“You have never been a burden, Miss Baggins. You have... you have done what I have not. I thank you.”

Bella placed her free hand on Thorin’s shoulder. “You have cared and protected for the Company and I have only put them in danger.”

“And I have not?” Thorin laughed without humor. “Trolls. Wargs. Orcs. Elves. Bad weather. More Orcs. Even more Elves. A mountain with the dragon that killed my people. Near starvation. Those Elves again. Armies. War. A fallen kingdom. And the madness that has been with a part of family is also a part of me. Always there. Always waiting to devour.”

She moved her hand to his cheek. "Thorin, all of your Dwarves are alive. You have not failed. You have not let the madness consume you. I see how you try to surround yourself with those who love you to keep you in check."

Thorin looked up for a moment before pressing his forehead against Bella's. "Kind words."

"True words."

They fell silent for a moment as Thorin found the ability to speak again. "You do not let yourself be consumed either. You could so easily have taken all of the treasure a dragon would desire if you just let your anger consume you. I know you have that within you and yet you do not use what many would consider to be a gift. Instead, you think about others and how it would hurt them."

"Kind words," Bella said.

"True words."

Bella grimaced. "What a pair of sick souls we are, my dear Dwarf."

"I fear we have the same disease. Dragon sickness." He stroked her cheek, both skin and scales. "Yours is a bit more literal."

Bella chuckled at the poor joke and then shivered from Thorin's touch. There seemed to be no hesitation in his movements whether he touched skin or scales.

Thorin pulled back enough to look Bella in the eyes. "I wish I could take it from you so..."

“You could see me as I really am? Just a blonde Shire girl with blue-green eyes. Nothing exciting.”

Thorin shook his head. “...so I would know that you would no longer feel guilt over something that was done to you against your will.”

Bella swallowed. The way Thorin spoke and looked at her... She closed the distance between them with a kiss.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

It was a light kiss, lips barely brushing against each other, but longer than would be accidental. Thorin began to kiss back, adding more pressure, more urgency to the kiss. Bella moved her hands to become tangled in his hair and Thorin took the opportunity to wrap one arm around her waist and the other around her shoulders.

Thorin pulled back slightly when Bella made a whimpering sound. “Did I hurt you? Too tight?”

Bella kissed him again. “No. That was a good sound.”

Thorin nodded, unsure of how to proceed. Bella pressed their foreheads together. “My dear Dwarf, thank you for worrying about my comfort in this.”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Thorin asked.

Bella kissed him with a slightly open mouth this time. It was a deeper kiss and somehow or other, Thorin found himself with a lap full of Hobbit (not that he objected to such).

“That’s one of the things I love about you Thorin,” Bella said, so close when she spoke their lips brushed against

each other, "Always looking out for others. That is so important."

Thorin tilted his head forward so they could kiss again. "It's warmer inside. I wouldn't want you cold," he said between kisses.

Somehow, Bella pressed herself closer to him. "Dear Dwarf, I find myself quite comfortable."

Thorin cleared his throat. "Well, I, um, good?"

"Very good," Bella said. She rested her head on his shoulder. "Are you cold?"

"No," Thorin said. He relaxed as he stroked her back. Bella made a pleased noise. "I had not hoped... had not hoped for this for a long time."

She pressed a kiss to the side of his neck. "Dear Dwarf." A small scene passed in Bella's mind and she laughed.

"What's so funny?" Thorin asked.

"I just had this odd thought come through my mind."

"Would you tell me?"

"It's silly and a bit dirty."

"Oh, now I *really* want to know."

Bella suppressed a giggle. "I was playing a harp at a feast, but it wasn't me, just my perspective. A Dwarf that looked a little like you, but wasn't you, came up and tried to talk to me, obviously very nervous."

Thorin stopped stroking her back. "What else?"

“Well... well I said, not me but sort of me, I told the Dwarf that I needed to keep playing my harp and then he said, ‘Well, I wouldn’t mind you playing my harp’ and then me/her started laughing and the poor Dwarf started turning red from embarrassment as he obviously hadn’t meant it to be unseemly.”

“The Dwarf... did he have a scar on his chin?”

“Ummm... yes. How did you...” Suddenly Bella was being kissed firmly by Thorin, their teeth clacking against each other. It was not a comfortable kiss, but she desperately wanted to help Thorin through whatever emotion he was going through.

Thorin pulled away enough to nuzzle his face against Bella’s neck, his beard a pleasant scrape against her skin. “I did not expect you would have Memories.”

“I can remember quite a lot of things.”

“No, no. I meant... I would not trifle with you, Bella. I would only come to you like this if you were my One.”

Bella shook her head. “I’m not a Dwarf.”

“Neither was Durin’s wife, yet she is reborn each time he is.” Thorin could feel the tension in Bella’s body. “Is this the first time this has happened to you?”

“I... I don’t think so. Maybe. When I broke the door, I saw the Dwarf and he give me, her, that gold crown I showed you the other day in the treasury.”

Thorin stroked Bella’s back. “There is nothing to be scared of. I promise. Those Memories are there only to bring wisdom or comfort.”

"It's not that. I've read about Ones and Dwarf culture and I... I'm still a Hobbit, aren't I?"

Thorin pressed a kiss to Bella's neck. "You are you as you have always been."

Bella pulled back and carefully cupped Thorin's face. "I don't properly understand. We Hobbits don't have this, but if you say that I'm safe and that it won't harm me, I believe you. We also don't have Ones so I don't know how to proceed, really. I don't trust romance books entirely on these things."

"We proceed however we wish to. My people court for some time after we have found our One. It is not an obligation, but a choice to love someone. It is a bit like... a push in the right direction. A person may have a One, but that One does not necessarily have that person in return," Thorin said.

"So, I don't have to marry you this instant, do I? That would be rather awkward seeing as we have only done a bit of rather inelegant flirting," Bella said

Thorin tried not to smile. "No, not immediately. That is not how it works."

Bella sighed in relief. "Thank goodness. I am not exactly at the best place in my mind at the moment. Curse aside, I have had a rough few years I need to sort through."

"Any time you need, I will give you," Thorin said, "Now is not the best time, no, but... I am glad you are here with me, Bella. Whatever you need or want, simply ask."

"And the same goes to you, you know. I may have to tell you no, but I may also be able to say yes." She pressed a kiss to

his cheek before whispering in his ear. "I have but one request of you, dear Dwarf."

"Ask."

"I know there are things you cannot control tomorrow, but I do know you can do this: don't die for pride's sake. I have feared for you soon after we met. I understand the desire to die in someplace better, but please do not die for your pride. Others love you deeply."

Thorin kissed Bella's cheek. "I did not want to die, coming here, I mean. You said that before, but it was not quite true. I have longed for home for so long. There was only a smoldering ember left of that desire by the time I met Gandalf in Bree. I feared that if I did not..." He pressed his forehead against Bella's for a moment. "...if I did not do it then, that fire within me would fade away. If I went on the quest so that some part of me would not die. I did this to live. I was not as I ought to be. I still am not, but having the Company surround me, my family beside me, my Father still being alive, and meeting you..." He smiled. "...this is closest to what I was supposed to be that I have ever felt. I promise you, Bella, my One, to not die for pride's sake, but live on to protect and care for those I love."

"Thank you, Thorin."

He nodded and leaned back so he could look Bella in the eye. "I would ask a question of you, now, if that is alright."

"Ask away."

Thorin ducked his head and seemed to be trying to compose himself by rubbing Bella's back. "How do Hobbits court? You have given up so much and I would wish to honor your life from before."

Bella smiled broadly and kissed Thorin's forehead. "Well, one would state their intentions to court."

"I would court you, Bella Baggins, with your permission" Thorin said as he looked up at her.

"And I accept your suit. Then, we would go on walks, give each other flowers and other small gifts. Lots of food is involved."

"I shall make the best of that as I can." He smiled slightly.

"And, most importantly, a great deal of kissing. Do you think you could help keep this courting tradition with me?"

"I think I can manage that."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The thing about Hobbits was that as long as it was proper they were very much for all sorts of pleasures. A bit of snogging was perfectly respectable. Bella had engaged in kissing with many partners throughout her youth, though she never understood what the fuss was about. At best, kissing was pleasant like a short adventure story before a walk, but it was not the height of enjoyment for her.

Thorin was different.

It was not just that he kept his hands from roaming (a good thing) or that he was not after her money (a very good thing). Those two issues had ruined plenty of good kisses. No, it was the way he touched her, cupping her face or stroking her back. Bella felt deeply cared for with Thorin. She was not just a means to an end, but something he could be content with.

Then his thumb brushed the front of Bella's ribs and she fell back. Thorin caught her before she hit the ground, pulling her back up onto his lap. "Alright? Hurt? Uncomfortable?" He was breathless and wide-eyed.

"No. Just. Um." Bella wanted to curl up on herself, feeling oddly exposed.

Thorin squeezed her shoulder and pressed a kiss to Bella's forehead. "There's nothing wrong with stopping. I'm not upset. Are you?"

Bella shook her head and moved closer to Thorin, trying to show that his touch was welcomed. He warily put his hand on her back again. "Can you tell me, Bella? If not, I won't ask."

"I... um... no one has touched the front of my ribs since... I don't know. Tickled as a child? A healer making sure I didn't get hurt in a fall?" Bella rubbed one of her eyes to keep back tears. "Smaug sometimes clawed at my ribs... not often. Affected my breathing and ability to work. I feel so ridiculous. You weren't hurting me."

"You are not ridiculous. He hurt you there. It was instinct. That instinct has kept you alive." Thorin pressed a kiss to her forehead. "We should go inside. I'll find you something to eat."

Bella snorted. "Eating won't make me feel that much better."

"Simply partaking in part of Hobbit courting traditions," Thorin said with a smile.

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There was more kissing when they were inside, small moments of affection. Bella felt herself becoming more possessive the longer she was with Thorin. She tried to separate what was her and what was the dragon or if there was a difference anymore.

Thorin squeezed her hand. "What's wrong?"

"Just... I feel... odd. Not you. Not us. Just me. Promise," Bella said.

Thorin kissed her hand, which for some reason made Bella more woozy than all of the kissing they had done. "We have all the time you need, âzyung."

"I don't know that word," Bella said.

Thorin smiled shyly and looked very young. "It means... well, the best translation in Westron is 'love' or 'beloved'."

Bella pulled him down for a kiss. When she started to really enjoy it, there was a burst of cheering. The couple froze before slowly pulling apart to find that they were standing outside the open door of the sitting room where the entire Company sat.

"Told you! Pay up!" Dis said.

There is groaning from most of the Company, save for Bifur. The two of them end up with several bags of coins begrudgingly given by Nori.

"Why is Mum always right?" Fíli asked.

"Because Mummy has known your uncle for long enough that he has problems expressing his emotions, idiot that he is," Dis said, smiling.

Frerin moaned from where he was lying on the ground. "You couldn't wait until tomorrow night so I would win the bet? Go confessing your love after the battle before swooning in your sweetheart's arms?"

Bella sputtered and tried to talk. Frerin snorted. "I was referring to the idiot, not you, Baggins."

"I DON'T SWOON!" Thorin said.

"You did today!" Dis said.

"I merely felt the need to be reacquainted with the floor!" Thorin said.

That sent the whole room roaring with laughter. In that moment, the Hobbit felt at ease. No one seemed upset with Bella for courting their prince even with her curse. Bella pressed a kiss to Thorin's cheek. "There, love, a bit of teasing."

Thorin groaned and hid his face in Bella's hair. "They should not have placed bets."

"Just a bit of fun, love. It could be worse. They could be betting on other things," Bella said.

"Like what?"

"Thorin, dear Dwarf, I am going to guess you have not been in the restricted part of the library."

He made a noise of confusion while still resting his head on Bella's shoulder.

"Love, when we are further in our relationship, I shall give you a demonstration."

The noise he made after that was both pleased and frustrated. Bella laughed. "I was promised food and my stomach is now quite eager to be satisfied."

Thorin chuckled and then groaned. "You'll be the end of me, dear Hobbit."

"Hopefully not," she said, feeling the weight of the next day already.

"I'll get you something to eat lass," Bofur said. He said something to Thorin that made the prince snap his head up and snarl something in return. Bofur seemed pleased. He gave a wink to Bella before heading to the kitchens.

"What was that about?" Bella asked.

"You do not want a direct translation," Thorin said.

Bella raised an eyebrow. Thorin sighed. "He said that you were his friend and I couldn't go ordering you about just because I'm a prince. He said, roughly translated of course, that he would cut off my head, stick said head on a pike, then shove that pike up an Orc's backside if I ever broke your heart."

"And that's the rough translation?" Bella said, amused and touched by Bofur's concern.

"The direct translation involved much more mutilation," Thorin said.

Bella kissed Thorin again, causing a few "yuck" sounds from some of the Company. "So, what do Dwarves do in courting, dear Dwarf?"

Dis said something to Thorin that caused him to blush. Dis and Frerin started laughing which just made Thorin more irritated.

"He's a grown Dwarf. He doesn't need you two needling him," Balin said as he puffed away on his pipe.

"But it's so much fun!" Dis said.

Dwalin surprised Bella by speaking up. "The lad has wanted to braid your hair for weeks now. Only loved ones do that. Dis has been purposefully braiding your hair with six strands instead of seven to piss Thorin off."

Bella tried and failed not to laugh. Thorin rested his head on Bella's shoulder and groaned. "I swear, I am a grown Dwarf and can court my One on my own."

"They are busybodies, dear Dwarf. If I was back in Hobbiton..." Bella unintentionally paused as she realized that even after all these years, she still missed the Shire. Thorin's hand on her back brought her back to the present. "...goodness me, they would never stop. They might just throw pots of flowers at you, begging to take the old Baggins spinster off their hands."

"Pots of flowers?" Thorin asked.

"Yes. Potted flowers mean you plan on coming around for a long time," Bella said.

Nori groaned, "No! Don't give him ideas. The whole place will be covered in flowers by spring."

"He is a romantic old sod. Always has been," Glóin said.

Bella laughed as did Thorin. It was ridiculous. They were all going into battle, possibly to their deaths, and they spoke of courtships and gifts, feasts and braids. Life always had the most inconvenient of timings. Then again, it would not be life otherwise.

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Despite Dwalin being a meddler, he was right in that Thorin had wanted to braid Bella's hair for a long time. Dis had annoyed Thorin by not putting Bella's hair in a seven strand braid. Though braids were mostly fashion, seven strands generally meant that one was under the protection of one of the royal families of the Seven Fathers.

Bella seemed content to sit on the floor with Thorin while he did her braid by the fire. Another day, he would do something more complicated. At the moment, he wanted her to remember everything before the tea took over. It made his heart ache that he had to protect her like this.

"I think I saw you, the day Smaug came here," Bella said quietly.

"Maybe. Will you tell me?"

"Well, I was with Frerin and Dis. Smaug was upset I had not stuck close to him after we entered Erebor. I refused to be killed by falling pillars after the horror that was flying. I needed to feel the ground beneath my feet like any sane person does, thank you. Anyway, I saw a boy ahead of us, what we Hobbits would consider a tween. Dark hair with a bit of blonde, he was wearing blue and silver and holding a sword, shouting something in Khuzdul. Now that I know a bit of the language, I think he was shouting for his siblings and also cursing quite a bit."

“Did the sword look like the one Fíli carries?” Thorin asked.

“Yes, actually,” Bella said.

“Then it was me.” Thorin pressed a kiss to the top of Bella’s head. “I might have seen you, but I was far too relieved to see my siblings alive to pay attention to much else. That must have been what triggered my first Memory of Sibeal. I am sorry. I had no idea you even existed.”

“Dear Dwarf, I know you and your people wanted to reclaim the mountain, but you were not able to stop the dragon. If you had come then, we all would have been dead. The only reason Smaug is dead without more casualties is because I became bigger than him over the years. I don’t think he ever counted on that happening. Can you imagine how furious he would have been if you had tried to sneak in here before I could kill him?”

Thorin finished off the braid and pulled Bella close to him. “No one will harm you again. You will not have to fight my battles for me.”

Bella nestled up against him, her breathing slowing. “It wasn’t your fight. I need to keep you safe.”

“I know.”

She chuckled. “Who knew a Shire girl would end up on the other side of the world, falling asleep in a Dwarf prince’s arms?”

“Who knew an Erebor boy would find his One in what he expected to be naught but ruins?” Thorin said.

“Hmm.” Bella tightened her hold on Thorin’s shirt. “Thorin. Something is wrong. Can’t stop falling asleep.”

“It’s alright. Rest.”

She tried to move away, but the sedative was already working. “What was in the tea?”

“I said no one would harm you again and you would not fight my battles,” Thorin said, “Go to sleep, Shire girl. It will all be over when you awake.”

“No. No. Don’t want to wake up to you dead.” Tears fell down her face. “Protect you. Protect all of you.”

“It’s our turn to protect you,” Thorin said, “I love you, Bella. I will keep you safe.”

Bella’s movements continued to slow. “Keep you safe, majestic idiot. Love you too.”

Thorin held her close. “I will come back to you. You won’t be alone after this battle.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: “Same Disease” by RED was my theme while writing this fic.

The “smoldering ember” part of the conversation came from [this post](#) .

Chapter XV: Fragile Things

Chapter Summary

In which war begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There are so many fragile things, after all. People break so easily, and so do dreams and hearts. — From *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders* by Neil Gaiman

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Something that Thorin had never fully comprehended in all of his years as a warrior was how simple it was to take a life. It only took one cut most of the time. There were those who said that it was more honorable to fight by sword and ax rather than bow and arrow, but Thorin found that honor dealt nothing with war.

Battles were never like in the tales where two enemies would fight for hours to the death. Fights were decided in a few seconds. It was a matter of stamina, the quality of one's gear, and one's fellow warriors.

There were no kings the moment one stepped on the battlefield. Generals were a vague concept to the soldier, looking for orders as dictated by flag bearers. They went through many flag bearers as they were the easiest to spot. Unfortunately, there were always young ones who were not quite old enough to be warriors to keep the messages coming.

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Bella awoke in her room, her head aching. She shifted and slipped off her bed. "What?" she mumbled to herself. She could barely move her arms.

Flashes from the night before pushed its way through Bella's addled thoughts. Speaking with the leaders, Thorin kissing her, drinking tea...

"You stupid, overprotective Dwarf! I am more anxious in here than I would be at the gate!" Bella crawled to the door of her room and found it locked.

"Oh, this is going to hurt," she said before placing her hands on the door.

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Kíli shot an arrow through the eye of an Orc that had tried to attack Thorin as his back was turned. Frerin shouted, "From above!"

The Dwarves were slammed into the ground as giant bats descended from the sky.

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Bella had nearly passed out by the time she reached the food supplies in the royal wing of Erebor. "Those Dwarves. I am going to... I don't know. Food. Need food."

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Glóin had lost part of his ear from the bats. No one else fared much better. Thorin yanked Frerin to his feet. "Bolg."

Frerin squinted at the Orc that stalked towards them. "And I thought his father was ugly."

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Bella finished her cram and jerky by the time she entered the healing house that had been set up behind the gates. None from the battle had been granted entrance. The refugees from Laketown added a sense of life and purpose to Erebor that Bella had not felt in the mountain before. She slipped into the room Thráin had been placed in. He tried to sit up against the Elf healer's warnings.

"Mr. Thráin, you would not want Thorin to worry about you, would you?" Bella said softly.

Thráin looked at Bella and nodded. She sat on the bed next to the Dwarf king and took his hand. "Now, Mr. Thráin, will you please lie down."

Thráin shook his head. "I have to protect them."

Bella's heart broke. "I know."

"I cannot let my people, my family, fight my battles for me," Thráin said. The Elf moved away as the Dwarf had calmed down.

"I know."

Thráin pressed his forehead against Bella's. "Save them, Miss Hobbit."

"I can't... I'm not a warrior... I would... and there is... I'm not... there is something they haven't told you..."

"I know," Thráin said.

Bella pulled back. "What?"

"One must never forget fairy stories. One must remember fairy stories." He closed his eyes. "At some point, you will not be able to stop the change."

Bella bowed her head. "Yes."

"Soon?"

"Yes."

"What do you love most, Hobbit?" Thráin said.

Bella looked up and smiled. "I love my Dwarves, Mr. Thráin. They are my friends and family."

Thráin opened his eyes. "Hold that in your thoughts. Find them. Save them."

"But what can stop me if I can't?" Bella asked, "I'm willing to die, but I don't want anyone to die because of me."

"A black arrow is the best way to do that, though I do not know of any within Erebor," Thráin said.

Bella squeeze Thráin's hand. "I know where to find one."

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Thorin slid on the ice of the frozen river as he tried to hold his ground against the Orc pushing against him. It had taken some time for Thorin to guess why the Orcs were throwing themselves at him and his family when there were easier targets to be had. It was not until he realized that with each Orc they killed that the Dwarves took another step back away from the main battle that he knew what was happening. They were being separated, unable to call

for aid. The Dwarf prince cut off an Orc's arm and both its legs before moving on to the next Orc.

The Line of Durin was running out of time.

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Bella had not realized how crowded a battle was. Her small size helped her, but she was grateful that she had worn the mithril shirt and carried a short sword. She guessed that Bard would be closer to Dale. It took time, but she found the city's lord. Bard fought one Orc just as another Goblin sneaked behind him for a killing blow.

"BARD! BEHIND YOU!" Bella shouted.

Bard ducked without turning and the two Orcs killed each other. Bella ran to help the Bowman up. "Bard, where are my Dwarves?"

"They have been pushed up near Ravenhill," Bard said. He blinked. "What are you doing here? This is no place for someone not trained to fight!" He killed an Orc that came towards them.

"Bard, once the Orcs are defeated, I need you to kill the thing that killed them," Bella said.

"What!" Bard said.

"Promise me! No matter what! You must kill it if you want your children to be safe!" Bella said.

"I will do anything to protect them. What's coming?" Bard said.

“The end of this,” Bella said as she made her way to the river, scales already beginning to form.

The Hobbit realized as she ran that others could help her Dwarves faster than she could reach them while still in her normal form. She needed to remain calm until the time of greatest need. A flash of red hair gave Bella an idea.

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The Line of Durin had reached the waterfall near the source of the river. Thorin stood back to back with Dis as Orcs kept pressing against them. They were still able to defend, but soon they would have no more room to fight as more Orcs descended upon them.

An arrow struck an Orc through the head that was not from Kíli. Two Elves entered the fray. Their speed was unmatched by the Orcs as the Elves carved a bloody path through the hoard.

Legolas son of Thranduil was soon by Thorin’s side. “We bring greetings from the Guardian of Erebor.”

“THAT STIFF-NECKED HOBBIT!” Thorin shouted as he cut through three Orcs in rapid succession.

The Elf prince had the nerve to look amused. “She said she would arrive soon to, and I quote, ‘save your stupid Dwarf hides’. The Hobbit pleaded for us to help until she could arrive. More Elves are coming as they are closer than Dain’s army.”

Kíli and Tauriel moved to stand on boulders to have a better vantage point to take out the more heavily armored Orcs. Fíli and Dis stood back to back with their matching battle axes easily cutting through Orcs.

Thorin, much to his chagrin, was grateful for the two Elves for coming. They were able to keep more Orcs at bay. Frerin said, "I think we can move forward if..."

Bolg slammed the flat of his sword against Frerin's stomach, sending the Dwarf flying backwards, hitting a stone wall and knocking him out.

That was when things fell apart and mere anarchy was let loose.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella climbed the rocks leading to the waterfall. She avoided the Orcs and they ignored her as they focused their energies on slaughtering the Line of Durin. The Hobbit ended up above the fight and she felt all of her energy drain out of her. She dropped to her knees.

Frerin was on the ground, unmoving and unnoticed by the Orcs. Legolas had also fallen with blood pooling from his head. Dis stood in front of her children. Kíli lay on the ground with an arrow sticking out of his shoulder while Fíli could only sit up. A great Orc tossed Tauriel against a stone pillar with ease.

Thorin sliced at the great Orc's leg and it dodged the swipe. Thorin moved closer to the waterfall, causing the multitude of Orcs to shift their attention to him instead of the fallen and Dis. The large Orc's sword clashed with Thorin's causing sparks to fly from the force of the hit.

Bella hissed. She took off her mithril shirt and put aside her sword. There was no need for them now when she was a better weapon.

And then she let herself fall.

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Bolg smashed Thorin to the ground. Thorin's armor protected him from being sliced open, but knocked the wind out of him. Bolg stood over Thorin and raised his sword to cut off the Dwarf's head.

Poetically, Bolg's head was bitten off by the dragon.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Enter the Dragon.

Fact: Tolkien was a signals officer for his unit during WWI. It was a dangerous job as if you were running flags, not only could your allies see you, but so could the enemy, thus making you a better target. One of the battles Tolkien participated in was the Battle of the Somme. The only reason Tolkien was not in the entirety of WWI (signals officers were in high demand because of the high death rate and the extensive training) was because he became extremely sick and did not properly recovery until just as the war was ending. The story of Luthien and Beren comes from a walk he took with his wife while he was recovering.

The flags are a combination of Tolkien's story and stories about military communication I have read. I did not know about the flags in BOTFA when I wrote this chapter.

Also, there is a reference to the poem "The Second Coming" hidden in the chapter.

Chapter XVI: Dragon Fire and Ruin

Chapter Summary

Enter the dragon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Come not between the dragon, and his wrath. - From *King Lear* by William Shakespeare

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Bella spit out the Bolg's head. "That tasted nastier than I expected." She glanced over at the motionless Orcs who had previously been attacking. "Boo."

The Orcs wisely ran away. Thorin raised his sword by instinct towards the dragon. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

The dragon looked over the fallen, teeth bared. "Are my Dwarves dead?"

Dis and Thorin checked to see if their kin still breathed. "They live," Dis said with a sigh of relief.

"Why did you fight with Elves?" the dragon said as it tilted its head.

"You sent them," Thorin said.

The dragon shook its head. "Right. Right. Foggy. Things are foggy. Elves... Elves... Kíli likes one of them. Are they

dead?”

Captain Tauriel pushed herself up to her hands and knees before halting her movements at the sight of a dragon. Bella’s tail slapped between Tauriel and Kíli. “You are a healer, are you not?”

“Yes,” Tauriel said.

“Heal them,” Bella said.

An orc head rolled towards the group as Thranduil stepped onto the frozen river. “A bit late for another dragon to attempt stealing Smaug’s hoard,” Thranduil said.

“I could care less about a bunch of sssssshiny rockssssssss. Can I kill him? Pleassssssse,” Bella hissed. It was a proper hiss with a snake tongue. Thorin was certain it was just for show.

“Bella, now is not the time for you to suddenly decide to be homicidal!” Thorin said.

Thranduil did not take his eyes off the dragon as he spoke to Thorin. “Bella? This is the Hobbit?”

The dragon growled. Thorin glared at Bella. “Don’t kill him. The Elves will go to war over it after they’re done exterminating the Orcs.”

Bella shook her head. “Orcs? Yes... there are still more of them, aren’t there? Where are the others? I knew you would be a more important target for them so I came to you first.”

Thorin sighed. “They are further back in the battle.”

Bella flicked one of the giant bats aside as if it were a buzzing fly. "Well then, let's hope this works."

"What does?" Thorin asked.

"Flying, of course," Bella said.

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Smaug made it look easy. Bella nearly crashed when she tried to take off without enough room. She ended up charging at some of the Orcs before coming into a place where she could stretch her wings fully.

Bella would have much rather continued walking, but she needed shock and awe to be on her side. She did *not* want to deal with more arrows than necessary. Hopefully, the Orcs would be too scared to fight back and just run away.

Her wings began to ache almost as soon as she was off the ground. She hissed, but soon realized her issue. Smaug almost always had leapt from a high place before gliding his way across the skies. Land take-offs were not as efficient. It was too late to change anything and Bella made it up into the unnatural cloud cover. It was thick, cold, and dark in the sky.

Then Bella went high enough to see the sun. Untouched. Shining. Clear. It felt like when winter ended and she went for her first long walk along the Shire paths

The dragon took a deep breath before diving through the clouds with a roar.

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin was able to awaken Frerin, though his brother was not completely cognate. Dwalin had been able to break through the lines and reach them. Dis carried Kíli while Dwalin carried Fíli. Captain Tauriel and King Thranduil both carried the Prince of the Woodland Realm. All of which meant Thorin was in charge of making sure they did not get killed.

“What is that?” Thranduil said as he tilted his head towards the battlefield.

It looked like the bats had clustered into a giant sphere and were rapidly descending to the ground towards the Orc troops. The bats were flung away to reveal the dragon. There was a great breath of fire setting many of the bats on fire as they fell to the ground. Bella slammed into the ground and ended up rolling several yards before landing on her claws. She roared.

“That was rather impressive,” Frerin said.

There were more flames. “YOU ALL HAVE TERRIBLE MANNERS! YOU CAN’T JUST GOING AROUND ATTACKING PEOPLE! IT’S RUDE!”

Thorin groaned. Even as a dragon, Bella’s Hobbit sensibilities still came through.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella roasted some more Orcs before taking off again. She had to avoid arrows from all of the armies. Apparently, reprimanding Orcs did not cause them to scatter like it did young Hobbits. She borrowed from Smaug’s boasting during their time together.

“MY ARMOR IS LIKE TENFOLD SHIELDS!” Bella said as she deflected a spear.

She snapped at an Orc; it lost its arm. “MY TEETH ARE SWORDS! MY CLAWS SPEARS!”

A cave troll tried to grab her tail, but she shook it off. “THE SHOCK OF MY TAIL A THUNDERBOLT!”

There were too many coming towards her. Bella began to flap her wings, knocking many soldiers over. “MY WINGS A HURRICANE AND MY BREATH DEATH!”

There was enough fire within her lungs to let loose another blast. Admittedly, Bella was not referring to fire with her last boast. No, she was referring to how awful Smaug’s breath was. Bella had flossed Smaug’s teeth too many times to think otherwise.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin slid again on the ice as he neared the Dwarf army. Gandalf caught Thorin from a nasty fall, only to shake the Dwarf. “DID YOU PUT BELLA UP TO THIS?”

“NO! I DIDN’T! SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO SLEEP THROUGH THE BATTLE! PUT ME DOWN!” Thorin said as he tried to smack the wizard.

Gandalf dropped Thorin. The wizard cut off an Orc’s head before continuing. “THIS IS A COMPLETE AND UTTER DISASTER!”

“IT’S NOT LIKE I ASKED HER TO DO IT!” Thorin said as he jumped to his feet, “We need to get her out of range before someone shoots her down.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella dropped a troll onto the fleeing Orcs. She dove down and breathed fire near the front of the line to stop the Orcs from escaping so easily. If the archers from the Free Folk did not get the Orcs, Bella would.

Why stop with Orcs? Why not get rid of all of Erebor's enemies? The Elves who starved your friends. The Men who tried to poison them. Why stop with these wretches?

Bella shook her head before diving down to scare the Goblins. She just needed to keep her wrath focused on the Orcs.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The wizard almost fell out of the goat pulled chariot that raced across the frozen river towards the dragon. "Do you even know how to drive this?" Gandalf asked.

"Of course I do! I've seen it done a thousand times!" Dori said.

Thorin steadied Frerin from falling off. "You should have gone back to the gate!"

Frerin grinned. "How many times do I have to tell you? I belong with my brother!"

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

With her sharp dragon eyes, Bella saw a familiar and ridiculous hat. She landed near Bofur as the Dwarf had been cut off from his fellow Dwarves and surrounded by Orcs.

“You have a choice, Orcs: roasted or sliced,” Bella growled.

The Orcs ran. Bella shot flames after them to encourage their flight.

The miner remained. “Well, aren’t you a *fiery* lass.”

“Really? You stand before one of the most terrifying monsters of Middle-Earth and you make a *pun*?” Bella said.

“You haven’t seen someone steal food from Bombur. You are just a nippy little kitten compared to that,” Bofur said, “I think that they’re running off now. Is that... oh no.”

Bella looked across the battlefield and saw a great bear come charging at her. She crouched down and roared. The bear had the audacity to roar back.

“Don’t kill him! He’s a sort of friend!” Bofur said.

“A BEAR IS AN ANIMAL! IT IS NOT A FRIEND! IT’S DINNER!” Bella said as she rose into the air.

“NO! BELLA! STOP! HE’S JUST TRYING TO KILL THE ORCS!” Bofur said.

As she rose higher, the voices in Bella’s head became louder.

Kill them all. Kill the thieves. Kill those who would take what belongs to you. You deserve your revenge.

Bella could not help but agree.

If any try to stop you, you kill them. Even your Dwarves may complain. Kill one of them. Make an example of them to the others.

She stopped flying for an instant, almost falling to the ground in that moment.

Why would I ever hurt my friends? Only a monster would do that.

Bella looked down and saw Bard coming towards her, the Black Arrow notched in his bow and ready to fire.

I am not a monster.

YOU ARE A MONSTER AND I WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LISTEN TO YOUR DRIVEL ONE MOMENT MORE SLAVE! YOU WILL DO AS I COMMAND! YOU FOUL, DISOBEDIENT CREATURE! KILL THEM ALL!

Bella removed one layer of scales from over her heart. It did not hurt. It felt like flicking a bit of dust off her skin.

I will never become like Smaug.

The dragon dropped closer to the ground to give the bowman an easier target.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The chariot had been abandoned as the soldiers had crowded together. Many were trying to hit the dragon. Bella drew closer and closer towards those who tried to shoot her.

“What is she doing? She’s not following the Orcs!” Thorin said.

A long, black arrow flew through the air and hit the dragon in the chest. Bella fell to the ground.

Thorin shoved his way through the mass of people, paying no heed to any calls for him to stay back. He saw spears and arrows hitting the dragon that lay on the ground. Bofur had been pulled back from the dragon by Bard. The Lord of Dale's face showed that he was beginning to recognize who the dragon was.

"NO! STOP IT! YOU'RE HURTING HER!" Thorin shouted. He felt something hit his head and he knew no more.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: To clarify, Bella herself is not suicidal. She very much wants to live. She does not want the dragon to hurt anyone else so she is willing to be severely injured to be stopped. Suicide is not encouraged by me in this fic or in real life.

Chapter XVII: So Comes Snow After Fire

Chapter Summary

Thorin wakes up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Well, it's my favorite: far off places, daring sword fights, magic spells, a prince in disguise! - From Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin hissed as he awoke. There was a great pain in his head and he felt nauseous. A cool hand touched his forehead.

"Don't get up," Frerin said.

"Bella," Thorin groaned as he tried to swat Frerin's hand away.

"She's alive as are the rest of the Company," Frerin said as his hand moved down to cover Thorin's eyes, "Don't open your eyes too quickly. You tried that early and immediately passed out."

"I was hit," Thorin groaned.

"That was Dwalin's doing. He was worried you were going to hurt yourself trying to protect Bella so he knocked you out," Frerin said.

“Funny way of showing concern,” Thorin said. He could feel that he was lying on scratchy, wool blankets.

“Yes, well, one must never doubt that Dwalin will do whatever it takes to protect the Line of Durin from its own stupidity.”

“Is Bella too hurt to come here?”

“She’s... um... Thorin, she can’t change back. She’s stuck as a dragon. Gandalf said it is due to her injuries and being so close to the fulfillment of the curse.”

Thorin was finally permitted to see that he was in a tent, morning light filtering through the edges. “Frerin, do you have a bucket? If not, I will empty my stomach onto your lap.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The world spun around him, but Thorin would not lie in bed and wait for news to be given to him. He nearly vomited again when he saw the state Bella was in.

There were great gaping holes in her scales revealing vulnerable flesh beneath. Spears and arrows still remained in her body. Bella had been chained and tied down, unable to uncurl herself or spread her wings. Gandalf and Bofur sat near her while guards from the Dwarves, Men, and Elves stood around them, ready to shoot the dragon if Bella tried to move.

Bofur seemed to be finishing a story as Thorin approached. “And then I said, ‘Well a fish would be a better kisser than you!’”

Gandalf gave a half-hearted chuckle, but Bella did nothing. The wizard motioned for Thorin to come closer.

The Dwarf fell to his knees and rested his head against Bella's. "I'm so sorry," he whispered.

Bella let out a low moan that would have been a sob in her Hobbit form. "You're alive. I didn't believe them."

"Yes, alive. A bit nauseous and wanting to pummel Dwalin, but alive," Thorin said, "Dear Burglar, why did you do this? Why didn't you wait?"

"Because... because I couldn't watch you die. I couldn't sit by and wait for you and the others to come to me dying or dead. I knew... I knew that people do not fear swords. They fear monsters. I could be that monster."

"You are not a monster. Monsters do not love others at the expense of themselves," Thorin said. He dropped his voice to a whisper as he stroked her head. "You can break these chains, can't you?"

Bella's sigh was answer enough.

"You could fly away and ..." Thorin was interrupted.

"I've scared them enough, haven't I? Besides, they need to feel control. I have lived without control most of my life. If I can give it to others..." She gave another moan. "I have to die. This thing I have become... I have no more goodness in me. Only evil."

Thorin continued stroking her scaly head. "There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure."

Bella snorted and smoke came from her nostrils. "I think that shows that you are a romantic and believe it will turn alright in the end."

Thorin smiled. "I met the wizard while searching for my father, long believed to be dead. I came to reclaim a homeland from a dragon that not even an entire mountain of Dwarves could defeat. I think me being a romantic is a well-established fact, Bella."

The dragon snickered. "I suppose so."

"Please, Bella. We will save you just as you have saved us. Fight to stay alive until the other wizards come," Thorin said.

Bella was silent for a long time. Finally, she said, "I will... for my Dwarves."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin spent the next few days either with Bella or Thráin, Fíli, and Kíli. The latter kept shooing him off to take care of Bella after Thráin explained to Thorin he had encouraged Bella in protecting Thorin. "I would have been out there too, but those blasted Elves put something in my food and knocked me out after your Hobbit came to visit." Frerin and Dis took care of the rest of the Line of Durin when Thorin was not there.

Despite the snowfall, the Company save the grievously injured all took their turns watching over Bella. Even Bard came by once to give a report to Bella on how the others fared.

"I am so sorry, Bella. I had no idea it was you. I ask for your forgiveness," Bard said.

"I asked you to do it, Bard. You are forgiven and should feel no guilt," Bella said.

Bella did not speak often with the Company. Instead, she listened to them. When she did speak, it was to make sure the Dwarves and Erebor were well. Sometimes, she would speak of the Shire and the growing seasons.

It took two days of such talk for Thorin to realize what she was doing. "You will not die, Bella. You do not have to tell us how to restore the land. You will be here with us to see the spring."

"Do you promise?" Bella asked.

"Yes."

"I know you to be a Dwarf of your word Thorin. I will have to rely on your faith."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

On the last day of the year, Gandalf came to Bella and Thorin. Snow fell and dusted Gandalf's blue hat. "The other wizards I have called upon have arrived."

Thorin kissed Bella on what would be her cheek in her Hobbit form. "All will be well, Bella. The spell will be broken."

"And we will live happily together until the end of our days?" Bella asked softly.

"We will, my heart. We will."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: There is a *Dracula Untold* reference hidden in this chapter.

The easiest part of writing this story was that I knew how dragons would work as soon as I saw the prompt. I soon knew what to do with Hobbit magic. What took me a long time was how to approach the relationship between Thorin and Bella. I don't remember quite what set it off, but thinking about Thorin being the damsel in distress and how the Beast is not the typical hero of fairy tales, I guess it sort of clicked. The main idea running through my head while writing this story can be found in [this post](#).

Also, "Ohhh, isn't this amazing/It's my favorite part because, you'll see/Here's where she meets Prince Charming/But she won't discover that it's him /'Til chapter three." *evil laugh*

Chapter XVIII: And Even Dragons Have Their Endings

Chapter Summary

Curses are not easily broken.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Then the lion said—but I don't know if it spoke—"You will have to let me undress you." I was afraid of his claws, but I can tell you, I was pretty nearly desperate now...That very first tear that he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right to my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I'd ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off.— From *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin did not seem to care that he was speaking to three wizards at the same moment, an unlikely occurrence as wizards were normally solitary creatures. Bella was interest, and not just because they were there to attempt to remove the curse.

Radagast the Brown was an odd individual who loved all creatures, but that did not mean he allowed evil to fester. Saruman the White was often to be found studying his books and seemed to know the most about dragons out of all of them. Gandalf stood between the two of them and kept the other two wizards enthusiasm to a minimum. Bella

could tell the wizards were rather fascinated by her case, but had been busy dealing with the necromancer in Dol Guldur. None knew exactly how the curse could be ended by the Smaug's wording.

"The change started when he attacked you?" Saruman asked.

"Yes," Bella said, "Gandalf has already told you my story. Can we please just get on with it? I am rather tired and if I am going to die, I might as well do it without all of these questions."

Saruman and Gandalf seemed amused by this while Radagast and Thorin were horrified. Gandalf sighed. "Well then, let's get you out in the open. We will need room for this."

Bella broke the chains with ease and shook off some of the spears and arrows the Company had been unable to remove, much to the horror of the guards. Thorin made them stay back as Bella stretched only one of her wings. "The other one is broken. I landed on it when I was hit," Bella said.

Radagast said something to Gandalf before being shushed. The Grey wizard looked to be in pain, but tried to appear cheerful. "Yes, well, no flying is necessary for this. To the open area, Bella."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella sat as best as she could in the open field and hunched over. For the first time, she felt big. Fighting Smaug, the Orcs, or even just sitting next to her Dwarves, she had always felt like a Hobbit. Now, she felt too big, like something had gone wrong in the making of her very being.

She felt like a dragon, not like a Hobbit. Some part of her wanted to snap at the wizards to leave her be. And the *hunger*. Bella wanted to eat anything she could catch. And when she meant anything, Bella meant *anything*. The good news in such a horrifying hunger was that it made the Hobbit part of Bella ill and thus put off her desire to eat.

Radagast made “tsk” noises as he walked around Bella. “They really hurt you, Miss Baggins.”

“I’ve had worse,” Bella said. She pointed to where the black arrow had entered her chest. “Except for this.”

“That is the one we are worried about,” Saruman said.

“You are a fool, Bella Baggins,” Gandalf said.

“Why? Because I would not stand by and watch my loved ones die?” Bella snapped at Gandalf with her sharp teeth, but the grey wizard smacked her snout with his staff.

“You are a fool, Bella Baggins! The battle would have been won without you revealing yourself!”

“BUT THE LINE OF DURIN WOULD HAVE FALLEN! MY FRIENDS WOULD HAVE DIED!” Bella roared before shutting her mouth tight to keep the fire within her from coming out.

Gandalf leaned against his staff, obviously weary. “Possibly, yes. That does not make what you did right. It is not just the outcome of our actions we should consider. Many people were hurt by the fires you started and the Eagles refused to come because of your presence. Beorn could have been killed if Bard had not shot you.”

Bella slumped. “I’m sorry.”

Gandalf patted the place where he had smacked her with his staff earlier. "I know, dear Hobbit. We are going to have to undress you."

Bella snorted. "As you can tell, I am wearing my best waistcoat."

"We mean your scales," Radagast said, "We are going to have to remove all those layers until we get to the Hobbit part of you. It is a bit more complicated than that, yes, but that is the basics of it."

"It will hurt, won't it?" Bella said.

Gandalf looked away for a moment. "Well..."

Saruman interrupted. "Yes, but I assume you would rather have the pain now than to hurt your friends."

Bella slumped even more at the thought of such a tragedy. "What must I do?"

"You must remove as much of your scales as you can before we take over. It is important that you want to be your real self again. Focus on what is important to you. Not just what you would die for, but what you would live for," Radagast said.

Bella knew she would die for a lot of things. Just simply pushing someone out of the way of an out-of-control horse would be enough for Bella to give up her life.

The voice of Smaug came to haunt Bella as she began to scrape off her scales. ***You have nothing to live for. You have no family. No friends. You will never see your beloved Shire again.***

It was true she would never see the Shire again. As much as she loved it and missed the beauty of her childhood home, it was not her home now. Her home was Erebor. She had not needed to repair it. Not really. She wanted to rebuild it. To give it life again. She did not know it then, but she was preparing a place for those she would live for.

I command you, Smaug, to be silent among the rest of the dead. You have no power over me. I have something to live for. Even though everything I gave up is gone now, I still have me. I will not let this curse destroy me. I was raised in love and I will not throw that love away.

With each layer Bella scraped away with her claws, she chanted names in her head for the people she wanted to live and to live with over and over again. *Fíli. Kíli. Balin. Dwalin. Óin. Glóin. Bifur. Bofur. Bombur. Dori. Nori. Ori. Dis. Frerin. Thorin.*

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Dis held a shift that belonged to Bella as the Company that could walk sat near the open area. The wizards had asked for the people to keep away as they were unsure of what would happen. This did nothing to reassure the Company.

“The Curse will be broken,” Thorin stated and that was all anyone had to say on the matter.

There was a scraping noise that made everyone cringe. They did not know what the sound was, but it was among the most disturbing things they had ever heard.

There was what could only be described as a whimper and the scraping stopped. For a few moments, everything was silent... and then the scraping continued.

This process repeated for a long time. The scraping would stop after a whimper before continuing. It happened over and over again in shorter intervals before there was almost nothing but whimpering.

The air changed. It became so cold that the snow stopped falling. Breathing became painful. Dwalin was about to get up and see what happened when the unnatural cold snapped back to where the snow could fall.

“HEALERS! NOW!” Gandalf called.

Óin, Dis, and two Elves carrying a stretcher ran to the wizards. The other Dwarves got to their feet and followed. The three wizards, the two Dwarves, and two Elves huddled around a small figure. Dragon scales and claws disintegrated around them, turning into dust. Frerin pulled out his necklace that held the scale Bella had given to him. It began to disappear as well.

“We can only stop the bleeding for a half hour at the most,” Radagast said, “This is not a fix. It is simply a way to get her inside.”

Frerin barked orders for the cart that had been waiting to come around to carry Bella back to Erebor. Dis stepped away to stand with her brothers. Blood covered her hands.

“She’s so small. How did I never notice how small she was before?” Dis whispered in Khuzdul.

When the cart stopped by the huddled group, all but the Elves stepped away. It was a shock to the Dwarves.

The first thing they saw was that there was far too much blood staining the shift Bella wore. Next they noted that the ground had become muddy and so she had a mixture of

blood and mud covering her hair and skin. Even if they could look past her wounds, they found her a changed Hobbit. She was far smaller than the Hobbit they knew, her bones far too easily visible. What hair they could see was no longer pure gold, but a mixture of blonde and red. Bella's lips were blue due to the cold and blood loss.

Thorin was the only one who saw Bella open her eyes. No longer were they the color of gold. They were blue-green, changing as the Elves lifted her into the cart.

But the Hobbit's eyes still held the fire of life. That fire gave Thorin hope that his One would survive.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The stars had grown old by the time the red-headed Elf captain exited the healing room and spoke to the Company. "We have done what we can. Her wounds transferred from her other form. We healed some, but not all."

"Speak plainly," Thorin said.

"If she makes the dawn, she will have done better than any of us could have hoped," Tauriel said.

The Dwarves took it as best as they could, death weighing heavily on their shoulders. "Is she asleep?" Thorin asked, hoping that she did not feel the pain.

Tauriel shook her head. "She is awake. She wants to see all of you."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Pain and cold. That was all Bella could really feel. She had not been cold since she had seen Smaug for the first time.

The pain was powerful and had no real pattern to it so she could not brace for the varying waves of pain. Bella could not even scream properly. The agony eventually subsided, but the cold grew worse. Unable to open her eyes or move her arms she began to panic.

"Where are they?" Bella rasped, "I need to see them."

"Lie still Bella," a warm, gruff voice said.

"No. My friends. Where are my friends?" Bella felt tears.

"Rest."

"No. Please. My friends."

A hand was placed on her head. Warmth finally came through Bella, allowing her to open her eyes to find Gandalf sitting next to her. "Dear Hobbit, we will bring them to you."

"Did it not work? Is that why you're sad?"

Gandalf shook his head. "You are completely a Hobbit again. Has anyone ever told you that you have your Father's eyes?"

"Not for a long while," Bella said. She would have smiled, but the pain was too much. "Why are you sad though?"

"We could not break the curse. Not completely. And..."

Bella closed her eyes to collect herself. "You did what you could. I thank you, old friend, for all the kindness you have shown me."

"We will keep trying if you allow it," Gandalf said.

“Only if you think it will do any good. Don’t tell them, but I’m scared. I don’t want them to be scared for me,” Bella whispered.

“I can promise, Bella, you have nothing to be scared of when it comes to death.”

“Do you know what happens to Hobbits, Gandalf? I have never found anyone who knows.”

“There are some mysteries I am not allowed to know the answers to. I do not know what happens exactly, but I do know that the divine spark of the Creator of All is within Hobbits, just as they are with Elves, Dwarves, and Mortal Men. The journey doesn’t end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass, and then you see it... White shores, and beyond, a far green country under a swift sunrise.”

Bella began to cry. “It sounds like that far green country is like the Shire.”

“Yes, something like that, only far better.”

“Better than the Shire?”

“Yes. It is your real home, the home we all long for and which life prepares us to love.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

After speaking with Óin, the other Dwarves of the Company entered one by one, starting with Bofur. He dutifully dabbed away any tears Bella had as the other Dwarves came to see her. Fíli and Kíli had to be carried in to say their final words to the Hobbit. The last to enter was Thorin. Bofur gave a

slight bow to Thorin and a kiss on Bella's forehead before standing aside so the two would have a moment.

The prince knelt next to the Hobbit. "It's almost sunrise of the Mortal Men's New Year, Burglar."

"Really? Will they be able to see it? It's good luck to see the first sunrise on the first day of the year."

"I don't believe in luck," Thorin said.

"You do know luck is just another word for fate? You don't think you and the Company were fated to retake the mountain?"

"Fate is cruel. Fate can go..." Thorin swallowed as he tried to keep his anger in check. He gently threaded his hands through the few curls in Bella's hair that were unmatted. "Your hair is like honey. My Shire girl with honey curls. I like this color on you better than gold."

"A high complement from a Dwarf," Bella said.

He smiled slightly. "I'm not sure what color your eyes are. They keep changing."

"They don't stay the same color. It depends on the light."

"I wouldn't mind looking at your eyes for the rest of my life to figure it out."

She smiled. "I have a secret. I love the color of your eyes too. They remind me of spring days when I would spin in the garden until I fell down because of how happy I was. Your eyes are like that, only better."

"A high compliment from a Hobbit."

Bella dropped her voice to a whisper. "I am myself again. Thank you, Thorin."

"You were always you, dear Hobbit." Thorin kissed her forehead.

"I'm so sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry for."

Bella's voice told Thorin that she wanted to cry. "I have to leave you, Thorin. The wizards cannot break the curse, only my dragon form."

"No. You will be completely better soon," Thorin said.

"Thorin..."

"I'll get that blasted Elf in here..."

"Thorin..."

"I don't care if he wants the gold. I'll give all that I have to make sure he..."

"Thorin!"

The Dwarf stopped talking.

"He can't heal me. No one can. They've already tried. Just... please. I can't lift my hand to you. Can you please hold my hand, Thorin? I'm... I don't want you to think I don't love you. I love you so much."

Thorin took her hand and held it tightly. "I love you as well." He rested his forehead against hers. "I'll do whatever you ask."

“Sing to me? I think... did I ever tell you that I began to love the Company when you all sang that night?”

“That we were not thieves, yes, but not that you began to love us then.”

“I did. It reminded... reminded me of home.”

“Then I’ll sing to you.”

BbBbBbBbBbBb

As Thorin began to sing, other voices of the Company joined. They sang lullabies. Bella kept her hold on Thorin’s hand as tight as she could, but her strength drained as the minutes passed.

“Beautiful... beautiful last goodbye,” Bella said between breaths. “Love you all... all so much... just another... adventure... Love you...” She stilled.

Gandalf knelt on the side opposite of Thorin. The wizard checked the Hobbit’s breathing.

“I’m sorry, my good Dwarves,” Gandalf said softly, “She’s gone.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: *ducks from rotten produce and pitchforks* This is not the last chapter.

The “Shire girl with honey curls” comes from [this picture by hattedhedgehog](#). Check out all of her work. It’s lovely.

Chapter XIX: Grief and Joy

Chapter Summary

Eucatastrophe.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

[The definition of *eucatastrophe*.] The consolation of fairy stories, the joy of the happy ending; or more correctly, the good catastrophe, the sudden, joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to a fairy tale); this joy, which is one of the things that fairy stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially escapist or fugitive. In its fairy tale or other world setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace, never to be counted on to reoccur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, or sorrow and failure, the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance. It denies, (in the face of much evidence if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. - From *On Fairy-Stories* by J.R.R. Tolkien

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin did not remember much after that save that he would not leave Bella's side. She grew colder as time went on. Time leached away all the warmth Bella had ever given the Dwarves.

The Company begged Thorin to come away from Bella's side. He ordered them to leave. Dis and Frerin tried to bring him away, but his silence told them what he thought of such an action. Even the wizards tried to convince him

that there was nothing more to be done, but he ignored them to let his grief devour him like he wished.

The one who convinced him that Bella needed to be put to rest was someone who Thorin barely knew. The red-headed female Elf captain who took an interest in Kíli knelt next to him. Thorin looked at her with a glance. In her hands was a green tunic with golden flowers embroidered along its edges.

“Your Majesty,” Tauriel said softly.

“Go, Elf,” Thorin said.

“Not before I make my request,” Tauriel said.

“Get out,” Thorin said.

“Do you wish for her to have her final rest like this? Have you looked at her?” Tauriel asked.

Thorin growled, “I have been with her for...”

“And you have become blind to how worn she looks,” Tauriel said, “Her shift is ruined and smells of sickness. Dirt and blood cake her skin. Her hair is matted. Would your Hobbit wish to be like this?”

Thorin rested his head against Bella’s bedside. “No,” he said softly.

“And I am sure she would like her modesty to remain, even after she has left this world,” Tauriel said.

“I would not leave her with...”

“Lady Dis and I will do it. I will merely be here to help move her. Would you deny your sister her own time to

grieve?" Tauriel said.

For the first time, Thorin realized that though Bella was his One, she had not just been his. Bella had cared for the entire Company. Dis had taken Bella under her wing since the two saw each other in the treasury. Frerin, Dwalin, and Bifur had become Bella's protectors. Dori had mothered the Hobbit. Ori, Fíli, and Kíli always had questions. Nori, Balin, and Óin had exchanged knowledge with her. Glóin and Bombur had enthusiastically told her about their families. Bofur had become her constant source of laughter.

"No, I would not deny such a request," Thorin said.

"Please, let us take care of her," Tauriel said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin had not realized how long he had been on his knees until he had to be helped out of the room by Dwalin and Frerin. When Dis went in and closed the door, it was like he had received his first kick in the stomach all over again.

"I need... I need air," Thorin said. He pushed away from Dwalin and Frerin. "I need the sun."

He was unsure of where he was going until he stood outside in Bella's small corner of the mountain. Snow dusted the ground and the wind bit at Thorin's exposed skin.

Thorin walked to the edge and then bent over double as he gasped for air. The image of Bella's last breath left him without his own.

A warm arm slung itself over Thorin's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Thorin," Frerin said.

“She... she belongs in the sunlight. We can’t bury her under stone. I can’t... can’t decide...” Thorin covered his eyes. “I can’t decide if she should be buried here where she spent most of her time facing east or facing towards the west, towards the Shire.”

“Bella would be happy either way,” Frerin said.

“The Elf gave her something appropriate.” Thorin stood up straight, eyes still covered. “An Elf understood better than me what Bella wanted.”

“No, she didn’t. Dori suggested it. Tauriel merely provided the materials. We can give her flowers of gold, silver, and jewels. We will bury her in the mithril shirt to show how much more she was worth to us than any metal or jewel,” Frerin said.

Thorin dropped his hand and steadied himself, the first sunrise of the new year rising. “I’ll build her a garden. Do you think she would want a tree?”

“That sounds like something she would enjoy.”

“We should...” Thorin stopped and squinted at something on the mountainside before him. He began to climb down.

“Thorin! What are you doing?” Frerin said as he climbed down after him.

“Stay there, Frerin! I can see it!”

“See what?”

“Stay there! I am going to pass these up to you!”

“Thorin! What are you...” Frerin took each item, seven in total, before pulling Thorin back up to the shelf. “How are these here?”

“Bella told me once that there was a certain type of flower that grew before the final frost had melted,” Thorin said as he took the flowers back in reverence. “She said they were called snowdrops because they bloomed in the snow sometimes. Though it is rare, they can even bloom in January. I can... I can give them to her.”

Frerin gave a pained smile. “Yes, you can.”

BbBbBbBbBbBb

When the brothers returned, Dis and Tauriel had finished their preparations. Thorin said to the Company quietly, “We will say our good-byes now before we prepare a place for her.”

Gandalf went first. After that, family groups went in together save for Thorin. He would have the only other private farewell.

When he entered the room, Thorin almost thought she was alive again. His sister and the Elf had done a loving job of restoring Bella to what she was in life. The illusion was shattered by the too-pale skin and the stillness.

Thorin knelt down and placed his head against Bella’s. “I love you, Bella. When I go to the Halls of Waiting, I will tear it down stone by stone to find you. I cannot go to you now. I have others I must protect, including those we loved so well. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world. But sad or merry, you must leave it now. You will be buried in the earth outside the mountain. A tree will grow there, strong

like you." He slipped the snowdrops under her clasped, stiff hands. "Even the flowers say farewell, good thief, my One. Zâyungi zu, Belladonna Baggins." He gave her a kiss of farewell on the lips for a brief moment before standing.

As Thorin began to walk away, his heart heavy, there was a soft sound behind him. He turned, wondering what or who had entered the room without his knowledge.

Bella's eyes blinked open. Her breath was the soft sound he heard. Thorin rushed over to the Hobbit. "Bella?"

"Thorin?" she said. "Where are we?"

"You're... you're..." He stroked her face and hair as tears filled his eyes.

Bella placed her hands over Thorin's to still him. "I thought... I was in Bag-End. My parents were there. They told me that it was only a short visit and I didn't understand. Then everyone I knew from the Shire was there, celebrating and... and they said it was a farewell party, because I couldn't stay. I was dead wasn't I?"

Thorin nodded. "I don't... I don't know what happened."

She looked down at the flower she had dropped.
"Snowdrops? Thorin, do you know what these mean?"

Thorin shook his head. "I just saw that there were flowers and I knew you would want them."

She laughed. "They mean 'hope', dear Dwarf."

He blinked. "Really?"

“Yes.” Bella frowned for a moment and then smiled shyly.
“You kissed me, didn’t you?”

“I... we were going to bury you and I... to say good-bye and...”

Bella sat up and pulled Thorin for a kiss. He wrapped his arms around her and held her close as they exchanged kisses. She laughed. “I was wrong.”

“About what?” Thorin asked as he rested his head on her shoulder.

“The Curse could be broken. We have fairy stories in the Shire. In some of them, a Hobbit is turned into some horrid creature and the only one who can save them is the one who can give them true love’s kiss. We may not have One’s like Dwarves, but there is a deep belief that we have a partner throughout our lives, Thorin. You are mine and I am yours.”

Thorin laughed. “Yes, I am yours and you are mine.”

The Company of Thorin Oakenshield ran into the room wondering if their king had cracked. Instead, they found their burglar alive. There were cheers and hugs. The grey wizard blotted away tears in his eyes as he laughed merrily at the sight.

A day of sorrow turned into a day of joy. The curse was finally broken.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: The reason for the multiple updates the past few days was so that I could publish this on New Year’s Day in my time zone.

Translations thanks to [khuzdul4u](#).

Zâyungi zu, Belladonna Baggins. - I love you,
Belladonna Baggins.

Chapter XX: Healing and Growth

Chapter Summary

There is healing and growth.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained. — C.S. Lewis

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Even after the curse was broken, Bella was not healthy. She was thinner than she had been before and unusually pale to the point her freckles almost disappeared. After a few steps, she would have to sit down.

“Beloved, there must be something we can do to help,” Thorin said two week into Bella’s recovery. They sat in what used to be the common room for the Company, but was now mainly used by the Royal Family.

Bella shook her head. “When I changed, I healed far too rapidly. I’ve lived twice as long as most Hobbits. My body is just weary. I will be fine.”

Thorin pressed his head against Bella’s. He stroked her hair which was only to her shoulders after having to need it cut after the curse had been broken and her hair matted beyond saving. “Are you sure I cannot help you?”

“Yes, dear Dwarf. I’m sure,” Bella said, “Though being able to cuddle up next to you is quite comforting.” She tilted her head up for a kiss.

Frerin squawked. “I leave you alone for two minutes and you’re already snogging!”

“We hadn’t got to the snogging part yet,” Thorin growled.

Frerin sat next to Thorin and passed over Bella and Thorin’s supper of cram. “You could just get married and one of us won’t have to stick around for propriety’s sake.”

“I can’t stand up for long enough to go from one end of the room to the other, let alone long enough for the ceremony,” Bella said.

“You could do it sitting. I’m tired of walking in on you two snogging all the time,” Frerin said.

Thorin slung an arm around Bella. “We wait for Bella to feel better and you will not pressure her just because you want a break from the monotony.”

“But Thorin, everyone has had a rough time. A wedding is a good excuse to celebrate a little,” Frerin said.

“I don’t think after the death of so many and the injury of so many more is a good time to celebrate,” Bella said.

“Ah, well, maybe not,” Frerin said.

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It took Thorin several days after that to realize why Bella’s recovery had been so slow. Thorin was irritated that the wizard had not brought it up until that moment.

Gandalf had been puffing away merrily on his pipe after dinner one night when he said, "Bella, when will you be taking supper?"

"Oh, I, um, I am quite content, Gandalf," Bella said.

"A Hobbit denying food?" Gandalf said.

The Company looked at Bella, then at Gandalf, then at Bella again. The Hobbit seemed flustered. "I am quite well. Truly."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

"Why didn't you tell me you needed more food?" Thorin said as he and Bella had a private discussion. By private, it meant everyone was listening in at the closed door of what was now Bella's study. It was the best Thorin could do.

"I don't need more food. I'm not dead, am I?" Bella said.

"You are not healing! You need more food!"

"I am not going to starve someone else!"

"You think I cannot provide for you?"

"No! That's not it all! I know supplies are limited and..."

"I'll go to the prancing Elf if I have to! I want you well!"

"This is not a matter of life or death!"

"It is! What if you caught a cold? Could your body even fight that in the current state you are in?"

"I will not have our people starve!"

“They won’t! Laketown is untouched and Dain brought us plenty of food! You are not harming anyone! Let us take care of you!”

Bella bit her lip and looked down at her feet. “Food is important to Hobbits. We make sure that everyone eats, even if you end up eating less yourself. It’s not right to take another person’s food.”

Thorin sighed. He placed his forehead against hers. “Dear Hobbit, you will not hurt anyone else by having extra food each day. You will be able to help us more if you are well.”

“Do you promise?”

“I promise.”

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

After two weeks of increasing Bella’s food, she was able to take extended walks around Erebor. She then told Thorin he might as well marry her, if only so they could kiss without Frerin acting scandalized. He agreed and they were married within three days. Gandalf disappeared to destinations unknown after that, though he was often a visitor to Erebor in the years that followed.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Winter continued its long, cold reign. Bella, Thráin, and many others spent their time recovering. The repairs Bella had made allowed for the Dwarves to focus on keeping Erebor warm and to look out for stragglers from the Orc army. With Thráin still healing, the duties of ruling Erebor mainly fell to Thorin.

"You have a guest, sir," Balin said as Thorin worked at his desk.

"Have them sent in," Thorin said.

"It's not that kind of guest," Balin said.

Balin's words meant that another leader must have arrived. Thorin sighed and gathered up his things necessary for an official meeting. Halfway to the entrance of Erebor, Frerin came up behind them. "Where are you off to Thorin? I thought this was business hours, not meeting hours."

"It is, but apparently we have a guest," Thorin said as he turned towards his brother.

Frerin saw someone behind Thorin. The look of joy and terror on Frerin's face could only mean one thing.

Thorin turned around and was still surprised. "Mother?"

The elderly Dwarrow woman was dressed in fine, but worn clothing covered a coat lined with white fur. "Sons," she said with a sigh of relief as she embraced the two of them. "You are alive."

"Yes, as is Dis. She is tending to Fíli and Kíli, who are resting up after their wounds. They will also be well," Thorin said.

Frigg nodded. "Is it... did I understand your message? They had to send a messenger after my party when the news came. I started the trek as soon as you said the dragon was dead. I can't... are you sure?"

"Father lives," Frerin said.

Frigg covered her mouth as she let out a sob. "Is he still him?"

"He is healing, but he is still Father," Thorin said.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella opened the door dressed in black and red velvet. She smiled when she saw Thorin. "Dear Dwarf, I'm so happy to see you. Your Father finally relented and decided to take a nap. Dis might borrow a frying pan if Fíli and Kíli don't settle down." She pressed a kiss to his cheek. "Is there something I could get you, Thorin?"

Frerin stifled a laugh as Thorin realized that his mother probably did not receive some of his later messages since she was on the road. Frigg merely smiled and whispered to Thorin, "Little wolf, do you remember the incident with the Warg and your training afterwards? Think worse."

Thorin nodded stiffly and said, "Bella, we have a guest. Mother, may I introduce Belladonna Baggins, Guardian of Erebor, Savior of the Line of Durin, Slayer of Smaug, and my wife."

Bella blushed at the titles, but curtsied. "Your majesty."

Frigg pulled Bella into a hug. "Savior of the Line of Durin, eh?"

"I suppose so," Bella said as she returned the hug in confusion.

Frigg pulled back and brushed a hand over Bella's braided hair. "You must be quite something, little Hobbit."

Bella made distressed noises and looked to Thorin for help. He placed a hand on his Mother's arm. Frigg smiled at her son. "I think I shall see my grandchildren first. I don't know..." she made her own sound of distress. Thorin felt ready to sit on the floor and bang his head against the stone walls.

The Hobbit took over and led Frigg to her daughter and grandsons. There was a great deal of excitement and fussing. Frigg smacked her children behind their heads for putting her grandchildren in danger. Fíli and Kíli preened under the attention of their grandmother. Kíli moaned about his broken arm while Fíli played up the pain in his battered knees. Bella sat down and looked exhausted. Thorin went to be with her, but Bella motioned him off. "Just a bit tired, dear Dwarf. Stay with them. There is plenty of time for me to be with you later. I can see where you get your smile from."

Thorin pressed a kiss to her forehead. "My dear Shire girl with honey curls."

"Fíli and Kíli being rowdy again?" a gruff voice asked as the door to the king's rooms opened. "They'll rip their stitches at this rate."

Frigg stood still as Thráin moved into the room. The king stopped and leaned heavily against his cane. "Âyùsithuh?"

"Ghivashuh."

Thráin gave a smile of utter joy as he tried to move to Frigg. His wife ran up to him and they embraced, murmuring to each other, hands touching the other's hair to make sure the other person was real.

“It is entirely unfair that you look more gorgeous than the day we met,” Thráin said.

“Oh, and you don’t look more handsome? Silly Dwarf,” Frigg said as she pressed their foreheads together, “Goodness me, you look handsome enough to make grown Dwarves faint, ghivashuh.”

Thráin sniffled. “I missed you.”

“And I you,” Frigg said before kissing her husband.

“This is worse than parents kissing,” Fíli whispered to Kíli.

Frerin smacked his nephew behind his head. “Oh, shut it. You’re worse than me.”

“No one is worse than you,” Dis and Thorin said at the same time.

“Dear ones, you had best get over here,” Frigg said.

So, several Dwarves (and a Hobbit dragged over by her Dwarf husband) ended up jostling each other, trying not to aggravate wounds as they hugged.

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Despite Bella’s original estimations, Thorin was not a younger model of Thráin. He was much more like Frigg in temperament and bearing. Quiet. Loyal. Terrifying. Strong hatred of Elves. Secretly an utter romantic.

Duties shifted and changed with the arrival of Frigg. As queen, she could take on many duties of the king to ease his burden. Thráin’s recovery sped up with the arrival of his wife. Bella’s own recovery continued on its own steady

pace. Fortunately, she spent a good portion of her time going over court rules and traditions that the books had not told her or she had not bothered to remember. Multiple people took up the job of teaching her.

Bella knew that many of the Dwarves of Erebor did not trust her. After all, she had been with Smaug for decades and had been a vicious killer at the Battle of the Five Armies as they now called it. (Bella did not understand why it was called that as there were more than five armies at the battle, but she supposed five was already an unwieldy number of armies anyway.) The people still seemed to care for her both for guarding Erebor and being Thorin's One. She supposed it was a start, though one thing did trouble her.

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Thorin spent what time he could with Bella when he was not at work. Most of the time, he would fall asleep with his head on her lap as she read, too tired even to speak anything beyond a greeting. On one such occasion, he awoke to Bella stroking his hair while staring at him intently.

Bella said softly with sorrow, "I don't think I can bear children, Thorin."

He blinked slowly awake. "I did not marry you to produce an heir."

"It's not that. I know you love me," Bella said. She smiled affectionately for a moment before the sorrow returned. "I was already middle-aged when Smaug took me. I knew of maybe half a dozen women in the Shire who had their first child after fifty. There were several who had their second child or more after that age but... Hobbits are not fertile

throughout their lives. With everything that has happened to me since then, I am not sure my body is capable of taking care of another life. My Mother lost three children before she had me and Hobbits are not known to have many miscarriages."

Thorin sat up and wrapped his arms around Bella, pressing a kiss on top of her head. "I want you to be healthy and whole. I want whatever time is left our lives to be together."

"I just feel guilty."

"This is not your fault. Smaug..."

"Smaug is not why I feel guilty. I never had a strong desire for children growing up. Other Hobbits would always want to be the first to hold a new baby, play with children, tell stories... I just didn't. I don't mind children. I just never had the desire others talked about. Now that I have you... I want to see what your child would be like, what our child would be like. Would they have the Took's light hair or your dark hair? Would they become a blacksmith like you or would they take more after Hobbits with a desire to tend things that grow?"

Thorin tilted Bella's head up so he could look at her. "I wonder these things too. I am in the last half century of my life. Dwarves often do not have children after their two hundredth year, male or female. I know there is nothing we can do to improve things, but not wishing to have children when you were younger will never be the cause of why we are unable to have them. Raising children is a craft like any other. There is no shame in not developing a desire to learn that craft until later in life or never at all." He pressed their

foreheads together. "I love you, Bella, and nothing will change that."

"I love you too," Bella said before kissing her husband.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

The Hobbit took to walking more and more each day. She could even ride a pony to Dale on occasion. On one such walk, Bella felt her stomach tighten as she turned the corner. Thorin was speaking to one of the lords of Erebor. She had not thought to ask how she was supposed to approach or not approach Thorin in such a situation.

Any fears of hers dissipated when Thorin smiled at her and held out his hand. She was pulled against his side and her arm was threaded around his. After a brief introduction, the conversation Thorin had continued for another minute before the noble bowed and left.

Thorin pressed his forehead against Bella's. "How are you today, wife?"

"Very well, husband. I was going to visit Sigrid and Tilda, Bard's girls," Bella said, "Dis and I have been spending time with them. Their Ma passed away about two years ago. They haven't had many older females in their life since then."

"You will be good for them," he kissed her forehead before whispering, "You may always come to my side if we run into each other like this again."

Bella sighed in relief. "Good. We haven't gotten that far in my lessons."

Thorin gave her a soft kiss. "Hmm... I have to go now. Enjoy your day."

Bella felt a stupid grin on her face, but could not bother to change it.

BbBbBbBbBbBb

Winter would soon end. The land needed a year of rest before food could be grown around the Lonely Mountain. The lands around Laketown could still produce and there was trade established with Greenwood again. All should have been well.

Yet Thorin could see that his wife's heart grew heavier with each passing day. Bella had always been enthusiastic about life coming back to Erebor. She had grand plans for the gardens and the fields. Thorin was surprised at how much work went into simply a year of rest.

Bella's smiles grew less sincere and she was more prone to wander in her daydreams. She sang and even danced on occasion. Still, there was something not quite right with the Hobbit and Thorin was fairly certain he knew what it was.

One night, as Thorin slid into bed with Bella and she curled up next to him (his heartbeat, her breathing, comforts in their own way), he spoke to her about what he believed to be the problem. "You miss the Shire."

Bella smiled up at him. "Of course. I miss the green of it. I look forward to when Erebor and Dale are restored."

"No, not the plant life. You miss the Shire," Thorin said.

She tried to smile, but her fingers tapping against Thorin's chest gave away her anxiety. Thorin took her hand in his

and kissed her palm. "Dear Hobbit, I am not angry. I merely want to ease your pain."

"You have. Greatly. I just... the Shire is not my home anymore. No one I loved in the Shire is alive. I shouldn't miss it anymore. I shouldn't have a longing for things that are long gone."

Thorin turned so they could lie side by side. He stroked her hair as he tried to sooth Bella. "I understand what it means to miss a place you know to be changed."

"You are my home, Thorin," Bella said as she gave a genuine smile.

He pressed his forehead against hers. "As you are mine. I still wish to ease your pain. I have an idea."

"What?" Bella asked.

"Dis has decided to return to the Blue Mountains as she does not wish to wait for Víli to come here. We could join her and stop in the Shire as it is nearby," Thorin said.

Bella shook her head. "You are needed here and have no reason to go half way across the world for my silliness."

"It is not silly," Thorin said, "Father is doing well. My Mother does all other duties he cannot do as of yet. Frerin, Fíli, and Kíli can be serious when need be. It actually might help those who wish to come back to Erebor if I returned to the Blue Mountains to help settle some trade agreements instead of using Víli as an intermediary."

"But you just got back here. I could never take someone from their home."

“As I said before, you are my home as well. I am willing to leave Erebor for a few months if it means that I can ease the ache in your heart.”

Bella blinked back tears. “Truly?”

“Truly.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Off to the Shire we go!

My apologies for not posting yesterday. I was out with my family all day. To make up for the late posting, I shall be posting the rest of the story now.

Thanks to [khuzdul4u](#) for the translation.

Khuzdul

âyûsithuh = my bride.

ghivashuh = my treasure.

Chapter XXI: There and Back Again

Chapter Summary

Bella and Thorin go There and Back Again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“There is a long road yet,” said Gandalf.

“But it is the last road,” said Bilbo. — From *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Snow still dusted the ground as the small group left Erebor for Erud Luin on an early March morning. They hoped to reach the Blue Mountains by May and then visit the Shire on the return trip. With Thorin and Bella traveled Dis, Dwalin, Bifur, Bofur, and Bombur.

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

Bella let out a soft sigh when they stopped at the edge of Mirkwood. She dismounted her pony and placed her hands on a tall tree. “Oh, this place is lovely. I can feel the stirrings of spring here.”

“Lovely? Wait until you see the bugs,” Dwalin said.

“Darkness dwelled here for a time,” Bella said, “But no more. It is being removed. This forest will return to being the Greenwood.”

“You can tell all of that from one touch?” Dis said.

Bella snorted. "Hardly. Just that this tree lives. Most Hobbits can encourage plants to grow, but I was gifted with the knack of repairing things not living. No, my information comes from Captain Tauriel. We have had some lovely chats while I was recovering before the Elves left."

BbBbBbBbBbBbBb

"I hate Elves," Thorin murmured as he and Bella prepared for dinner with the Elven King.

Bella placed a hand on his chest. "Calm down, love. They are our allies now."

"They are thieves and tried to kill..."

She placed a hand behind Thorin's neck. "Love, I was there too. We need to use the Elves until Dale is repaired fully. Since the Master died, we can rely on Laketown as well, but not entirely. Thranduil will want credit given to him, so we give him that and then we take what we really want, which is to rebuild Erebor. Alright?"

Thorin nodded and hugged Bella. "Do I have to like him?"

"No. Not at all. His son, Legolas, seems a good sort. Not that you have to like him either. Though could you please try getting along with Captain Tauriel? Kíli seems to think she is rather wonderful and I quite like her too."

Thorin sighed. "I suppose since she helped you and... what do you mean 'Kíli seems to think she is rather wonderful'?"

Bella tried to pull away. "I think they're calling us to dinner."

Thorin kept his hold on his wife. "Bella..."

She sighed. "I thought it was rather obvious they were flirting."

"Flirting? *Flirting?* My nephew is *flirting* with an *Elf*?" Thorin said.

Bella gently smacked Thorin behind his head. "Love, you're married to a Hobbit that could have burned you alive. I really doubt you have much room to criticize your nephew."

"But... but... but Elves!"

"As I said, a flirtation. Nothing more."

Thorin whimpered and rested his head against Bella's shoulder. "Why did it have to be an Elf?"

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Thorin kept his hand on Orcrist as the Skin-Changer and the Hobbit stared at each other outside of Beorn's home. Gandalf had said Beorn would offer shelter to them if they ever passed through the area, but that did not reassure Thorin. After all, the last time the Beorn and Bella had met they attempted to kill each other.

"So, you were the dragon at the battle?" Beorn said.

"Yes," Bella said with neither hesitation nor shame.

"But no longer."

"But no longer," Bella repeated. Her nose twitched as she thought.

Beorn laughed. "Look at you! Like a little bunny."

Bella wriggled her nose as she frowned. "I'm not little. Everyone else is just unusually tall."

Beorn laughed again. "Come! You have had a long journey so far and more roads to travel! I have been told Hobbits are quite fond of gardens, little bunny."

"Not a bunny," Bella mumbled.

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Thorin was not jealous of an Elf. That would be ridiculous. Yes, Bella had instantly become friends with Lord Elrond the moment the two met, but that did not mean Thorin was jealous. So she spent more time speaking whatever flowery language the Elves used than Thorin had expected. It was not a problem. At all. None whatsoever. Nor her spending extended periods of time in the Rivendell library. Nope. No problem at all.

The couple entered their room after dinner. Bella slumped against the door. "Dear Dwarf, what is the matter? You were scowling throughout the meal."

Thorin huffed, but said nothing, felling particularly childish and not wanting to show it. Bella hummed to herself as she nuzzled her face against Thorin's arm. "It is rather nice to have new books to read. I love Erebor's libraries, but I haven't read much of anything written in the past two-hundred years. Back in the Shire, I would get a new book every month. Some came even as far as Gondor." She moved around to face Thorin. "It is nice to get a new perspective on things. Lord Elrond has been patient with me and what I do not know. There is only so much about the last two centuries I know from what I heard from gossip in Laketown or from our Dwarves. It is no one's fault."

Thorin sighed and pulled Bella into an embrace. "And it pleases you, to learn such?"

"Very much. Also, there are not many opportunities to speak to one who remembers the First Age. I have learned quite a lot about that and healing since we have come here and I think I can apply that knowledge to the benefit of Erebor." She stroked his back. "You have not failed me."

"I was not worried."

"You have had to fight for your people's survival with almost no help from others for so long and you do not want those you love to go without. It is alright to not be able to provide everything for everyone. I am quite content, though I think you are not." She pulled back to look at Thorin. "Am I not providing you with something? Do you need me more often? I can spend more time with you."

Thorin groaned and pressed their foreheads together. "I am being a Dwarfling. I have had you by my side every day on this journey with little interference from others. I am greedy for my time with you."

"I quite enjoy my time with you as well."

"Do not shorten or end anything that you enjoy. I would give you anything I could to make you happy."

"It would make me quite happy for you to kiss me."

He readily complied.

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Víli was an affectionate and playful Dwarf with a subtle side of cunning. He looked much like Fíli, though Kíli's half-grin

obviously came from Víli. Dis and her husband were quite openly affectionate for Dwarves, which seemed to be a Durin trait. As Bella observed the Dwarves in the Blue Mountains, she noted that most gave each other a head bump at the most in public. Even Bombur was reserved in public with his wife and children, but openly loved his family in private. Bella supposed it was due to Dwarves having to keep up the appearance that they were made of stone with no cracks within them.

The Blue Mountains were not as grand as Erebor in any sort of way. They were smaller and had less fine decorations. The community was made mostly of coal miners, a good but not rich trade. What they did have was the most intricate tunnel systems Bella had ever heard of beyond Moria. Every single mountain in Erud Luin was connected with multiple routes, allowing for swift travel.

As she was quite healthy, Bella was able to sit in on trade and council meetings with Thorin. As his wife and future queen, Bella was to be Thorin's second eyes and ears, his most trusted counselor. What he knew, she knew.

By the beginning of June, what business Thorin had in the Blue Mountains was completed. Bombur and Bifur would go with the caravan that would go through the Gap of Rohan while Víli would stay with his wife to go the more direct route to Erebor. It was time to go to the Shire one last time.

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They were a quarter of a day's ride from the Shire when Bella was certain her nerves would be the end of her. They had camped outside of the Shire that evening instead of pushing on to an inn as they did not know how the Hobbits

would react to one of their own being among a gaggle of Dwarves. Dwalin, Thorin, and Bifur were quite fierce looking. Bombur, Dis, and Víli would be treated cautiously. Bofur would be welcomed after a song. Bella was the only one she was unsure of how the Hobbits would greet her.

Bella tried not to toss and turn in her bedroll as to not wake up Thorin. It did not work as Thorin wrapped his arms around Bella. "It's alright to be nervous. I did not sleep at all the night before we entered Erebor."

"It's not as if anyone would recognize me. There will be no awkward meetings. This is just to see how my home has fared since... since I left."

"Since you were taken," Thorin corrected gently.

Bella turned in his arms to face Thorin. "You will stay with me, won't you?"

"Always."

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Michel Delving was as busy as it always had been. Bella was glad to see fashions had not changed as dramatically as she feared. Save for a few braids in her hair (and the group of Dwarves with her), she could pass off as a respectable Hobbit in her orange bodice and green skirt which were both embroidered with flowers.

The noise took a little time to get used to. It was neither the chaos of a Mortal Men's market nor the boisterousness of the Dwarves. This was a Hobbit market and that meant everyone was quite happy as there was a great deal of food about. Yes, everyone tried to be respectable, but seeing a

friend across the market allowed even the most reserved of Hobbits to squeal, wave, and skip for joy.

They were to go to the Thain's home as Thorin was to adjust trade agreements between the Shire and Erud Luin as so many less people were living in the Blue Mountains. Bella tugged on Thorin's sleeve when she saw a booth of Old Toby being sold. "Can I buy a pipe? Not that I don't like Dwarven ones, but it just... tastes different."

"Go ahead. We will wait," Thorin said.

Bella hopped off her pony and went to trade with the merchant. A red headed Hobbit customer, close to being out of his tweens if not already out of it, laughed as Bella mused over what pipe to get.

"Don't know which one to get, ma'am?" the red head said.

"Just deciding whether I should get one or two," Bella said.

"Well, it is always good to have a spare. Never know when your first pipe might be broken," the young Hobbit said.

"I suppose so, but I really only need the one at the moment. Which do you prefer?" Bella said.

"Well, I'm partial to that one, but that's because I know the maker of that particularly fine pipe."

"Then I will get that one," Bella said. She politely traded with the merchant before returning to her conversation with the red head. "The Thain's home is just up the road and to the left, yes?"

"Aye. I can take you there myself. He's my grandfather. Pippin Took is my name."

“Bella.”

The two shook hands. “Come on, then, Miss Bella. I’ll lead you and your Dwarves the rest of the way.”

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Bella had almost forgotten how complicated Hobbit deals could be. She dared not imagine how stressful it must have been for Thráin and Thorin to make a deal with Hobbits as they settled into the Blue Mountains without knowing about customs. One poorly worded comment could spell disaster for a deal. The Tooks were good folk and a bit more understanding about outsiders not having proper Hobbit sensibilities, but they still expected a certain amount of civility.

Pippin, it seemed, would mostly like be Thain in the future, so the young Hobbit sat in on the meeting. He made an odd comment about the Old Took at one point which Bella corrected without a second thought.

“It was his 111th birthday and not his 110th that Gandalf the Grey attended,” Bella said.

Pippin’s smile took on a sly grin. “And how would you know that, not being from the Shire and all?”

“Well, I...”

“Lad, fetch the sketch book,” the Thain said to Pippin, “I’ve been wondering that myself. You seem an odd sort, traveling with Dwarves. Mr. Oaksenshield, you said your people were traveling to the Lonely Mountain, was it?”

“Aye,” Thorin said.

“Well, you see, there is a bit of a legend amongst Hobbit about that place. More of a fairy story, really. One day, a long time ago, a dragon came and attacked the Shire,” the Thain said. He took the sketch book from Pippin and flipped it open to a sketch of Bella. “So this lass takes her sword...”

“It was a walking stick,” Bella mumbled as her cheeks flushed.

The Thain winked at Bella. “Exactly. See, she made a deal with the dragon to save the Shire and all the Hobbits by giving herself up as a sacrifice. There was not much anyone could do, so when the dragon flew off with her, none expected to hear of her again. Until, some years later, some Dwarves, displaced by a dragon of similar description, came to live in the Blue Mountains. Now, it was quite sad, yes, but we Hobbits were particularly interested as some young Dwarves said something about seeing a lass with curly hair in the Lonely Mountain, protecting people from the dragon. The lass who was taken had a friend. If you can tell me what the lass’ name was and her friend’s, I’ll be quite certain you are the Hobbit of our tales.”

Bella blinked back tears. “My name is Belladonna Baggins, daughter of Belladonna Took-Baggins and Bungo Baggins. My best friend’s name was Lobelia Bracegirdle Sackville-Baggins.”

There were shouts of joy from the Hobbits followed by a great deal of hugging and food.

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Bella stood on the doorstep of Bag-End again, her hand raised to knock on the door now painted red instead of green. Thorin stood by his wife, but made no motion to knock on the door for her.

“Were you scared and also excited when the door appeared?” Bella asked softly.

“Terrified and thrilled,” Thorin said.

She knocked on the door. A Hobbit woman with flaming red-hair opened the door. “Mistress Baggins! A pleasure for you to come. I am Rosie Gamgee. Frodo is out with my husband, Sam, on some business with Merry Brandybuck. Come in. You’re just in time for tea.”

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Much had changed over the years, but the bones of Bag-End had remained the same. The study still had many of Bella and Bungo’s books along with many new books of adventures. Children filled the home as her parents had always wanted. Frodo was a bachelor and thought it waste to have Bag-End empty, so invited the Gamgees to live with him to give the place some life. Such an option was not available to a bachelorette, and Bella was glad of Frodo’s choice.

She quite liked Frodo, Sam, and Merry when they were introduced. Pippin showed up just in time for tea. She could imagine the four of them as nephews and the stories she would have told them if somehow time and land had not separated their lives.

The Gamgees’ children were quite taken with the Dwarves, particularly Dwalin with so many visible tattoos and his partially bitten off ear. Bella was not surprised by this. She was surprised that they quite liked *her*. Apparently she “told the best stories” out of all of them. Bella and Frodo discussed the fate of the Sackville-Baggins’. Lobelia had given birth to a son, but the line had died with Lotho. The

Hobbit lady always had hope that her friend would be returned to the Shire and Lobelia was quite right.

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Thorin had nearly fallen asleep one evening when he felt Bella kiss his cheek. "Thank you, Dear Dwarf, for this time back in the Shire."

"You gave me back my home." He stroked the side and front of Bella's ribs. "It was the least I could do to take you back to yours."

"No, you're wrong. The Shire was my home and I am so grateful to see it whole again. Erebor is home now for us and I can't wait to go back again."

Thorin smiled and pulled her down for a kiss, pouring into it all of the joy Bella had brought to him and all the joy he wanted to give to her.

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Bella and Thorin said farewell to the Shire, never to return again. Bella's relatives and friends, particularly Frodo, Pippin, Merry, Sam, and their families were often visitors in Erebor.

"Let's go home, Thorin," Bella said as he helped her onto her pony.

Thorin smiled up at her with open admiration and love. He squeezed her knee. "Yes. Let's go home."

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There was still a long journey before Bella and her Dwarves could say they have been there and back again. They visited Lord Elrond once again, opening up a long friendship between Erebor and Rivendell that would not end until the passing of the Elves into the West. Beorn was ecstatic to see that his little bunny was getting fat again. (“She’s not a little bunny and if she was, she would be *my* little bunny!” Thorin snarled before being gently smacked by Dis.) King Thranduil was still cold, but his son was open in his friendship with Bella and the Dwarves. Tauriel already had spent a great deal of time with the Dwarves of Erebor in Bella’s absence. Laketown had made progress on returning Esgaroth to its former glory. Dale was habitable, though many years would pass before it had returned to its former glory.

And Erebor... It was becoming the greatest of Dwarven kingdoms once again. Thráin and Frigg performed their roles with great dignity and grace that grew day by day. Frerin, Fíli, and Kíli had not brought the Lonely Mountain down with pranks. Fíli and Kíli were ecstatic to see their father again; Thráin approved and liked Víli. The other Dwarves did well in their new roles and the entire Company would be together again by Durin’s Day.

“Well, I’m back,” Bella said to Thorin as they entered Erebor.

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The Hobbit had her Dwarf. The Prince had his Burglar. The Lonely Mountain had its King and Queen. Most importantly, Bella, Thorin, and the rest of the Company had each other which they all agreed was the best thing of all.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: There is an epilogue.

I was sitting in the library writing this chapter trying not to cry when Bella came back to Bag-End.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

In which our heroes live happily together until the end of their days.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten. — From the introduction of *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman in which Neil Gaiman paraphrased Terry Pratchett paraphrasing G.K. Chesterton

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September 14, 2949 of the Third Age

Despite several layers of fur and blankets covering him, Thorin felt a small body leap onto his back. “Da, wake up! You said we could go to Dale today!”

Thorin pulled his five year old daughter between himself and Bella. “Is the sun even up, Sapphire?”

“It is, Da. Come on!” Sapphire said.

Bella made an inquisitive noise. “Little one?”

“Mum,” Sapphire said. She rolled over to face her mother. “We’re going to Dale today.”

“Mmmhmm. Give Da and me a chance to wake-up,” She stroked her daughter’s curly, black hair. “Don’t you want breakfast?” Bella said.

“Breakfast!” Sapphire said.

“Yes. We’ll have first breakfast here and then second breakfast at Dale. How does that sound?” Bella said.

“Yes, yes, yes! Please!” Sapphire said.

“Well, why don’t you go get nanny and get dressed. Then we’ll eat,” Bella said.

“Yes, Mum,” Sapphire said. She gave a kiss to her mother and her father before running back to her room which was connected to the Crowned Prince’s Suite.

Bella hooked her leg over Thorn’s waist and pulled herself up against his chest. “Good morning, my love.”

“Good morning,” Thorin said before kissing his wife.

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The small family sat by the fire in Sapphire’s room as Bella brushed out her daughter’s curly hair. The little princess ate a piece of toast quietly as she listened to her father explain what was expected of her on their trip.

“You are to stay with either your mother or me the entire time. Do not go off on your own. If you get separated from us, stay where you are or go to another mother. Do you understand?” Thorin said.

“Yes, Da,” Sapphire said, “Can I wear earrings like Mum has?”

“Of course. I’ll get them for you,” Thorin said.

When Thorin had been told that Bella had given birth to a girl, by the end of the day he commissioned matching jewelry for the mother and daughter. Some in gold. Some in silver. All of it the best the Dwarves of Erebor could make. Some of the jewels were for when Sapphire was older, but some she could wear as a child.

Thorin slipped a gold ear cuff on both of his daughter’s pointed ears and then carefully put in simple gold posts. “There. Everything comfortable? Good. Let’s go see King Bard.”

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The trip to Dale was a pleasant one with nary a hint of a diplomatic incident and certainly no disputes over the illustrious trade between the two kingdoms. “It really is an excuse for your father and King Bard to gossip like the ninnies that they are,” Bella had told Sapphire once and Thorin could not disagree.

Despite misgivings earlier in their relationship, Bard and Thorin became good friends after the birth of Sapphire. Bard found the little Dwobbit to be adorable and spoiled the child like one would a niece. Sigrid had grown into a beautiful lady who received requests for courting all the way from Gondor. Bain grew in stature and strength like his father. Tilda had become known as a girl with a loving heart who would be a beauty like her older sister.

Though it was only half a day’s visit, Thorin, Bella, and Sapphire spent the rest of the day out of Erebor until dinner. The days became shorter and cooler, so letting the Hobbit and Dwobbit have their time outdoors beyond the royal garden was a necessity for everyone’s ease.

"I want to be able to see Greenwood, Da," Sapphire said as they set out their picnic.

"You are as bad as your cousin, Kíli," Thorin said.

"I'm not in love with an Elf. I don't understand why they're not married yet," Sapphire said.

"Kíli and Tauriel are taking a long time in their courting," Thorin said.

"Yes, well, they were not being pushed together by everyone who ever saw the two of them in same room as we were," Bella said with a laugh.

"Will Uncle Frerin be visiting us soon?" Sapphire asked.

"Yes. He said he would be back from the Iron Hills in less than a week, in time for your mother's birthday," Thorin said.

Sapphire nodded. "Good. Uncle Frerin always gives the best presents and Mum deserves the best. Mine will be better than his though."

Thorin laughed. "I know. You made it."

Sapphire made a shushing sound before settling between her parents to eat her lunch. "Can I have a story?"

"What kind of story?" Thorin asked as he wrapped her in his cloak to keep her from catching a chill.

"Can you tell me about when you met Da, Mum?" Sapphire asked.

Bella laughed. "You ask that every other time."

“But it’s one of my favorites! It’s better than a fairy story because it’s true!” Sapphire protested.

“Alright, alright,” Bella said, “In a hole in the ground their lived a Hobbit...”

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Thorin had not realized he had fallen asleep along with Sapphire until he had awoken from his nap. His head rested on Bella’s lap as she stroked his hair. “Afternoon, dear Dwarf,” Bella said.

“Afternoon, dear wife,” Thorin said. He could not reach up for her as he was holding their daughter against his chest to make sure she did not roll off onto the ground.

Bella pressed a kiss to his lips and smiled broadly. “You think she’ll be happy with the news?”

Thorin turned his head and kissed Bella’s stomach. “She has been asking for a sibling since she could talk. I think she will be.”

“And are you happy, Thorin?” Bella asked.

Sapphire stirred and slowly began to wake. As she yawned, Thorin sat up and wrapped his arm around Bella’s waist. “Dear Burglar, as long as my heart is yours and yours is mine, there will be no one with as much joy as us.”

Bella gave a long, chaste kiss to Thorin to show how joyful she was with his answer. Sapphire stuck out her tongue. “Gross.”

Thorin laughed as he broke away from the kiss. “Dear wife, I think we have something to tell our daughter.”

Sapphire looked up at her parents expectantly.

“I’m going to have a baby in a few months, making you a big sister,” Bella said.

Sapphire let out a big whoop and danced around her parents. “This is the best day ever!”

Thorin and Bella could not agree more.

And they lived happily together, until the end of their days.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: And that is the end of this story. Everyone lives happily ever after and then they all hang out in the Halls of Mandos until the unmaking of the world and then everyone parties in the new Arda for the rest of eternity.

Thank you to everyone who has read this story. A big thanks to HRBB and fatynmachine for making this story possible. This has been a great growing experience for me as a writer and the outpouring of support from everyone has truly been amazing.

Until Our Next Meeting, the best of blessings to you, dear readers.

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