



The Lord Of The Rings

J. R. R. Tolkien

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*Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all. One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.*

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This tale grew in the telling, until it became a history of the Great War of the Ring and included many glimpses of the yet more ancient history that preceded it. It was begun soon after *The Hobbit* was written and before its publication in 1937; but I did not go on with this sequel, for I wished first to complete and set in order the mythology and legends of the Elder Days, which had then been taking shape for some years. I desired to do this for my own satisfaction, and I had little hope that other people would be interested in this work, especially since it was primarily linguistic in inspiration and was begun in order to provide the necessary background of 'history' for Elvish tongues.

When those whose advice and opinion I sought corrected little hope to no hope, I went back to the sequel, encouraged by requests from readers for more information concerning hobbits and their adventures. But the story was drawn irresistibly towards the older world, and became an account, as it were, of its end and passing away before its beginning and middle had been told. The process had begun in the writing of *The Hobbit*, in which there were already some references to the older matter: Elrond, Gondolin, the High-elves, and the orcs, as well as glimpses that had arisen unbidden of things higher or deeper or darker than its surface: Durin, Moria, Gandalf, the Necromancer, the Ring. The discovery of the significance of these glimpses and of their relation to the ancient histories revealed the Third Age and its culmination in the War of the Ring. Those who had asked for more information about hobbits eventually got it, but they had to wait a long time; for the composition of *The Lord of the Rings* went on at intervals during the years 1936 to 1949, a period in which I had many duties that I did not neglect, and many other interests as a learner and teacher that often absorbed me. The delay was, of course, 1

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also increased by the outbreak of war in 1939, by the end of which year the tale had not yet reached the end of Book One. In spite of the darkness of the next five years I found that the story could not now be wholly abandoned, and I plodded on, mostly by night, till I stood by Balin's tomb in Moria. There I halted for a long while. It was almost a year later when I went on and so came to Lothlórien and the Great River late in 1941. In the next year I wrote the first drafts of the matter that now stands as Book Three, and the beginnings of chapters I and III of Book Five; and there as the beacons flared in Anórien and Théoden came to Harrowdale I stopped. Foresight had failed and there was no time for thought. It

harrowed and stopped. Foresight had failed and there was no time for thought. It was during 1944 that, leaving the loose ends and perplexities of a war which it was my task to conduct, or at least to report, I forced myself to tackle the journey of Frodo to Mordor. These chapters, eventually to become Book Four, were written and sent out as a serial to my son, Christopher, then in South Africa with the RAF. Nonetheless it took another five years before the tale was brought to its present end; in that time I changed my house, my chair, and my college, and the days though less dark were no less laborious. Then when the 'end' had at last been reached the whole story had to be revised, and indeed largely re-written backwards. And it had to be typed, and re-typed: by me; the cost of professional typing by the ten-fingered was beyond my means. The Lord of the Rings has been read by many people since it finally appeared in print; and I should like to say something here with reference to the many opinions or guesses that I have received or have read concerning the motives and meaning of the tale. The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them. As a guide I had only my own feelings for what is appealing or moving, and for many the guide was inevitably often at fault. Some who have read the book, or at any rate have reviewed it, have found it boring, absurd, or contemptible; and I have no cause to complain, since I have similar opinions of their works, or of the kinds of writing that they evidently prefer. But even from the points of view of many who have enjoyed my story there is much that fails to please. It is perhaps not possible in a long tale to please everybody at all points, nor to displease everybody at the same points; for I find from the letters that I have received that the passages or chapters that are to some a blemish are all by others specially approved. The most critical reader of all, myself, now finds many defects, minor and major, but being fortunately under no obligation either 2

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to review the book or to write it again, he will pass over these in silence, except one that has been noted by others: the book is too short. As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical. As the story grew it put down roots (into the past) and threw out unexpected branches: but its main theme was settled from the outset by the inevitable choice of the Ring as the link between it and The Hobbit. The crucial chapter, 'The Shadow of the Past', is one of the oldest parts of the tale. It

was written long before the foreshadow of 1939 had yet become a threat of inevitable disaster, and from that point the story would have developed along essentially the same lines, if that disaster had been averted. Its sources are things long before in mind, or in some cases already written, and little or nothing in it was modified by the war that began in 1939 or its sequels. The real war does not resemble the legendary war in its process or its conclusion. If it had inspired or directed the development of the legend, then certainly the Ring would have been seized and used against Sauron; he would not have been annihilated but enslaved, and Barad-dûr would not have been destroyed but occupied. Saruman, failing to get possession of the Ring, would in the confusion and treacheries of the time have found in Mordor the missing links in his own researches into Ring-lore, and before long he would have made a Great Ring of his own with which to challenge the self-styled Ruler of Middle-earth. In that conflict both sides would have held hobbits in hatred and contempt: they would not long have survived even as slaves.

Other arrangements could be devised according to the tastes or views of those who like allegory or topical reference. But I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.

An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience, but the ways in which a story-germ uses the soil of experience are extremely complex, and attempts to define the process are at best guesses from evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous. It is also false, though naturally attractive, when the lives of an author and critic have overlapped, to suppose that the movements of thought or the events of times common to both were necessarily the most powerful influences. One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel fully its oppression; but 3

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as the years go by it seems now often forgotten that to be caught in youth by 1914 was no less hideous an experience than to be involved in 1939 and the following years. By 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead. Or to take a

less grievous matter: it has been supposed by some that 'The Scouring of the Shire' reflects the situation in England at the time when I was finishing my tale. It does not. It is an essential part of the plot, foreseen from the outset, though in the event modified by the character of Saruman as developed in the story without, need I say, any allegorical significance or contemporary political reference whatsoever. It has indeed some basis in experience, though slender (for the economic situation was entirely different), and much further back. The country in which I lived in childhood was being shabbily destroyed before I was ten, in days when motor-cars were rare objects (I had never seen one) and men were still building suburban railways. Recently I saw in a paper a picture of the last decrepitude of the once thriving corn-mill beside its pool that long ago seemed to me so important. I never liked the looks of the Young miller, but his father, the Old miller, had a black beard, and he was not named Sandyman.

The Lord of the Rings is now issued in a new edition, and the opportunity has been taken of revising it. A number of errors and inconsistencies that still remained in the text have been corrected, and an attempt has been made to provide information on a few points which attentive readers have raised. I have considered all their comments and enquiries, and if some seem to have been passed over that may be because I have failed to keep my notes in order; but many enquiries could only be answered by additional appendices, or indeed by the production of an accessory volume containing much of the material that I did not include in the original edition, in particular more detailed linguistic information. In the meantime this edition offers this Foreword, an addition to the Prologue, some notes, and an index of the names of persons and places. This index is in intention complete in items but not in references, since for the present purpose it has been necessary to reduce its bulk. A complete index, making full use of the material prepared for me by Mrs. N. Smith, belongs rather to the accessory volume.

PROLOGUE

1. Concerning Hobbits

This book is largely concerned with Hobbits, and from its pages a reader may discover much of their character and a little of their history. Further information will also be found in the selection from the Red Book of Westmarch that has already been published, under the title of *The Hobbit*. That story was derived from the earlier chapters of the Red Book, composed by Bilbo himself, the first Hobbit to become famous in the world at large, and called by him *There and Back Again*, since they told of his journey into the East and his return: an adventure which later involved all the Hobbits in the great events of that Age that are here related. Many, however, may wish to know more about this remarkable people from the outset, while some may not possess the earlier book. For such readers a few notes on the more important points are here collected from Hobbit-lore, and the first adventure is briefly recalled. Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today; for they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilful with tools. Even in ancient days they were, as a rule, shy of ‘the Big Folk’, as they call us, and now they avoid us with dismay and are becoming hard to find. They are quick of hearing and sharp-eyed, and though they are inclined to be fat and do not hurry unnecessarily, they are nonetheless nimble and deft in their movements. They possessed from the first the art of disappearing swiftly and silently, when large folk whom they do not wish

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to meet come blundering by; and this an they have developed until to Men it may seem magical. But Hobbits have never, in fact, studied magic of any kind, and their elusiveness is due solely to a professional skill that heredity and practice, and a close friendship with the earth, have rendered inimitable by bigger and clumsier races.

For they are a little people, smaller than Dwarves: less stout and stocky, that is, even when they are not actually much shorter. Their height is variable, ranging between two and four feet of our measure. They seldom now reach three feet; but they have dwindled, they say, and in ancient days they were taller. According to the Red Book, Bandobras Took (Bullroarer), son of Isengrim the Second, was four foot five and able to ride a horse. He was surpassed in all Hobbit records only by two famous characters of old; but that curious matter is dealt with in this book.

As for the Hobbits of the Shire, with whom these tales are concerned, in the days of their peace and prosperity they were a merry folk. They dressed in bright colours, being notably fond of yellow and green; but they seldom wore shoes, since their feet had tough leathery soles and were clad in a thick curling hair, much like the hair of their heads, which was commonly brown. Thus, the only craft little practised among them was shoemaking; but they had long and skilful fingers and could make many other useful and comely things. Their faces were as a rule good-natured rather than beautiful, broad, bright-eyed, red-cheeked, with mouths apt to laughter, and to eating and drinking. And laugh they did, and eat, and drink, often and heartily, being fond of simple jests at all times, and of six meals a day (when they could get them). They were hospitable and delighted in parties, and in presents, which they gave away freely and eagerly accepted. It is plain indeed that in spite of later estrangement Hobbits are relatives of ours: far nearer to us than Elves, or even than Dwarves. Of old they spoke the languages of Men, after their own fashion, and liked and disliked much the same things as Men did. But what exactly our relationship is can no longer be discovered. The beginning of Hobbits lies far back in the Elder Days that are now lost and forgotten. Only the Elves still preserve any records of that vanished time, and their traditions are concerned almost entirely with their own history, in which Men appear seldom and Hobbits are not mentioned at all. Yet it is clear that Hobbits had, in fact, lived quietly in Middle-earth for many long years before other folk became even aware of them. And the world being after all full of strange creatures beyond count, these little people seemed of very little importance. But in the days of Bilbo, and of Frodo his heir, they suddenly became, by no wish

of their own, both important and renowned, and troubled the counsels of the Wise and the Great.

Those days, the Third Age of Middle-earth, are now long past, and the shape of all lands has been changed; but the regions in which Hobbits then lived were doubtless the same as those in which they still linger: the NorthWest of the Old World, east of the Sea. Of their original home the Hobbits in Bilbo's time preserved no knowledge. A love of learning (other than genealogical lore) was far from general among them, but there remained still a few in the older families who studied their own books, and even gathered reports of old times and distant lands from Elves, Dwarves, and Men. Their own records began only after the settlement of the Shire, and their most ancient legends hardly looked further back than their Wandering Days. It is clear, nonetheless, from these legends, and from the evidence of their peculiar words and customs, that like many other folk Hobbits had in the distant past moved westward. Their earliest tales seem to glimpse a time when they dwelt in the upper vales of Anduin, between the eaves of Greenwood the Great and the Misty Mountains. Why they later undertook the hard and perilous crossing of the mountains into Eriador is no longer certain. Their own accounts speak of the multiplying of Men in the land, and of a shadow that fell on the forest, so that it became darkened and its new name was Mirkwood.

Before the crossing of the mountains the Hobbits had already become divided into three somewhat different breeds: Harfoots, Stoors, and Fallohides. The Harfoots were browner of skin, smaller, and shorter, and they were beardless and bootless; their hands and feet were neat and nimble; and they preferred highlands and hillsides. The Stoors were broader, heavier in build; their feet and hands were larger, and they preferred flat lands and riversides. The Fallohides were fairer of skin and also of hair, and they were taller and slimmer than the others; they were lovers of trees and of woodlands.

The Harfoots had much to do with Dwarves in ancient times, and long lived in the foothills of the mountains. They moved westward early, and roamed over Eriador as far as Weathertop while the others were still in the Wilderland. They were the most normal and representative variety of Hobbit, and far the most numerous. They were the most inclined to settle in one place, and longest preserved their ancestral habit of living in tunnels and holes.

The Stoors lingered long by the banks of the Great River Anduin, and were less shy of Men. They came west after the Harfoots and followed the course of the

any of them. They came west after the Harfoots and followed the course of the Loudwater southwards; and there many of them long dwelt 7

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between Tharbad and the borders of Dunland before they moved north again.

The Fallohides, the least numerous, were a northerly branch. They were more friendly with Elves than the other Hobbits were, and had more skill in language and song than in handicrafts; and of old they preferred hunting to tilling. They crossed the mountains north of Rivendell and came down the River Hoarwell. In Eriador they soon mingled with the other kinds that had preceded them, but being somewhat bolder and more adventurous, they were often found as leaders or chieftains among clans of Harfoots or Stoors. Even in Bilbo's time the strong Fallohidish strain could still be noted among the greater families, such as the Tookes and the Masters of Buckland.

In the westlands of Eriador, between the Misty Mountains and the Mountains of Lune, the Hobbits found both Men and Elves. Indeed, a remnant still dwelt there of the Dúnedain, the kings of Men that came over the Sea out of Westernesse; but they were dwindling fast and the lands of their North Kingdom were falling far and wide into waste. There was room and to spare for incomers, and ere long the Hobbits began to settle in ordered communities. Most of their earlier settlements had long disappeared and been forgotten in Bilbo's time; but one of the first to become important still endured, though reduced in size; this was at Bree and in the Chetwood that lay round about, some forty miles east of the Shire. It was in these early days, doubtless, that the Hobbits learned their letters and began to write after the manner of the Dúnedain, who had in their turn long before learned the art from the Elves. And in those days also they forgot whatever languages they had used before, and spoke ever after the Common Speech, the Westron as it was named, that was current through all the lands of the kings from Arnor to Gondor, and about all the coasts of the Sea from Belfalas to Lune. Yet they kept a few words of their own, as well as their own names of months and days, and a great store of personal names out of the past. About this time legend among the Hobbits first becomes history with a reckoning of years. For it was in the one thousand six hundred and first year of the Third Age that the Fallohide brothers, Marcho and Blanco, set out from Bree; and having obtained permission from the high king at Fornost, they crossed the great river Berenduin with a great following of Hobbits. They

crossed the brown river Baranduin with a great following of Hobbits. They passed over the Bridge of Stonebows, that had been built in the days of the power of the North Kingdom, and they took all the land beyond to dwell in, between the river and the Far Downs. All that was demanded of them was that they should keep the Great Bridge in repair, 8

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and all other bridges and roads, speed the king's messengers, and acknowledge his lordship. Thus began the Shire-reckoning, for the year of the crossing of the Brandywine (as the Hobbits turned the name) became Year One of the Shire, and all later dates were reckoned from it. At once the western Hobbits fell in love with their new land, and they remained there, and soon passed once more out of the history of Men and of Elves. While there was still a king they were in name his subjects, but they were, in fact, ruled by their own chieftains and meddled not at all with events in the world outside. To the last battle at Fornost with the Witch-lord of Angmar they sent some bowmen to the aid of the king, or so they maintained, though no tales of Men record it. But in that war the North Kingdom ended; and then the Hobbits took the land for their own, and they chose from their own chiefs a Thain to hold the authority of the king that was gone. There for a thousand years they were little troubled by wars, and they prospered and multiplied after the Dark Plague (S.R. 37) until the disaster of the Long Winter and the famine that followed it. Many thousands then perished, but the Days of Dearth (1158-60) were at the time of this tale long past and the Hobbits had again become accustomed to plenty. The land was rich and kindly, and though it had long been deserted when they entered it, it had before been well tilled, and there the king had once had many farms, cornlands, vineyards, and woods. Forty leagues it stretched from the Far Downs to the Brandywine Bridge, and fifty from the northern moors to the marshes in the south. The Hobbits named it the Shire, as the region of the authority of their Thain, and a district of well-ordered business; and there in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk. They forgot or ignored what little they had ever known of the Guardians, and of the labours of those that made possible the long peace of the Shire. They were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it.

At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves. In olden days they had, of course, been often obliged to fight to maintain themselves in a hard world; but in Bilbo's time that was very ancient history. The last battle, before this story opens, and indeed the only one that had ever been fought within the borders of the Shire, was beyond living memory: the Battle of Greenfields, S.R. 1147, in which Bandobras Took routed an invasion of Orcs. Even the weathers had 9

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grown milder, and the wolves that had once come ravening out of the North in bitter white winters were now only a grandfather's tale. So, though there was still some store of weapons in the Shire, these were used mostly as trophies, hanging above hearths or on walls, or gathered into the museum at Michel Delving. The Mathom-house it was called; for anything that Hobbits had no immediate use for, but were unwilling to throw away, they called a mathom. Their dwellings were apt to become rather crowded with mathoms, and many of the presents that passed from hand to hand were of that sort.

Nonetheless, ease and peace had left this people still curiously tough. They were, if it came to it, difficult to daunt or to kill; and they were, perhaps, so unwearingly fond of good things not least because they could, when put to it, do without them, and could survive rough handling by grief, foe, or weather in a way that astonished those who did not know them well and looked no further than their bellies and their well-fed faces. Though slow to quarrel, and for sport killing nothing that lived, they were doughty at bay, and at need could still handle arms. They shot well with the bow, for they were keen-eyed and sure at the mark. Not only with bows and arrows. If any Hobbit stooped for a stone, it was well to get quickly under cover, as all trespassing beasts knew very well.

All Hobbits had originally lived in holes in the ground, or so they believed, and in such dwellings they still felt most at home; but in the course of time they had been obliged to adopt other forms of abode. Actually in the Shire in Bilbo's days it was, as a rule, only the richest and the poorest Hobbits that maintained the old custom. The poorest went on living in burrows of the most primitive kind, mere holes indeed, with only one window or none; while the well-to-do still constructed more luxurious versions of the simple diggings of old. But suitable sites for these large and ramifying tunnels (or smials as they called them) were

not everywhere to be found; and in the flats and the low-lying districts the Hobbits, as they multiplied, began to build above ground. Indeed, even in the hilly regions and the older villages, such as Hobbiton or Tuckborough, or in the chief township of the Shire, Michel Delving on the White Downs, there were now many houses of wood, brick, or stone. These were specially favoured by millers, smiths, ropers, and cartwrights, and others of that sort; for even when they had holes to live in. Hobbits had long been accustomed to build sheds and workshops. The habit of building farmhouses and barns was said to have begun among the inhabitants of the Marish down by the Brandywine. The Hobbits of that quarter, the Eastfarthing, were rather large and heavylegged, and they wore dwarf-boots in muddy weather. But they were well 10

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known to be Stoors in a large part of their blood, as indeed was shown by the down that many grew on their chins. No Harfoot or Fallohide had any trace of a beard. Indeed, the folk of the Marish, and of Buckland, east of the River, which they afterwards occupied, came for the most part later into the Shire up from south-away; and they still had many peculiar names and strange words not found elsewhere in the Shire.

It is probable that the craft of building, as many other crafts beside, was derived from the Dúnedain. But the Hobbits may have learned it direct from the Elves, the teachers of Men in their youth. For the Elves of the High Kindred had not yet forsaken Middle-earth, and they dwelt still at that time at the Grey Havens away to the west, and in other places within reach of the Shire. Three Elf-towers of immemorial age were still to be seen on the Tower Hills beyond the western marches. They shone far off in the moonlight. The tallest was furthest away, standing alone upon a green mound. The Hobbits of the Westfarthing said that one could see the Sea from the lop of that tower; but no Hobbit had ever been known to climb it. Indeed, few Hobbits had ever seen or sailed upon the Sea, and fewer still had ever returned to report it. Most Hobbits regarded even rivers and small boats with deep misgivings, and not many of them could swim. And as the days of the Shire lengthened they spoke less and less with the Elves, and grew afraid of them, and distrustful of those that had dealings with them; and the Sea became a word of fear among them, and a token of death, and they turned their faces away from the hills in the west. The craft of building may have come from Elves or Men, but the Hobbits used it in their own fashion. They did not go in

elves or men, but the Hobbits used it in their own fashion. They did not go in for towers. Their houses were usually long, low, and comfortable. The oldest kind were, indeed, no more than built imitations of smials, thatched with dry grass or straw, or roofed with turves, and having walls somewhat bulged. That stage, however, belonged to the early days of the Shire, and hobbit-building had long since been altered, improved by devices, learned from Dwarves, or discovered by themselves. A preference for round windows, and even round doors, was the chief remaining peculiarity of hobbit-architecture. The houses and the holes of Shire-hobbits were often large, and inhabited by large families. (Bilbo and Frodo Baggins were as bachelors very exceptional, as they were also in many other ways, such as their friendship with the Elves.) Sometimes, as in the case of the Took of Great Smials, or the Brandybucks of Brandy Hall, many generations of relatives lived in (comparative) peace together in one ancestral and many-tunnelled mansion. All Hobbits were, in any case, clannish and reckoned up their relationships with great care. They drew long and elaborate family-trees 11

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with innumerable branches. In dealing with Hobbits it is important to remember who is related to whom, and in what degree. It would be impossible in this book to set out a family-tree that included even the more important members of the more important families at the time which these tales tell of. The genealogical trees at the end of the Red Book of Westmarch are a small book in themselves, and all but Hobbits would find them exceedingly dull. Hobbits delighted in such things, if they were accurate: they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions.

2. Concerning Pipe-weed

There is another astonishing thing about Hobbits of old that must be mentioned, an astonishing habit: they imbibed or inhaled, through pipes of clay or wood, the smoke of the burning leaves of a herb, which they called pipe-weed or leaf, a variety probably of *Nicotiana*. A great deal of mystery surrounds the origin of this peculiar custom, or ‘art’ as the Hobbits preferred to call it. All that could be discovered about it in antiquity was put together by Meriadoc Brandybuck (later Master of Buckland), and since he and the tobacco of the Southfarthing play a part in the history that follows, his remarks in the introduction to his *Herblore of*

part in the history that follows, his remarks in the introduction to his Herbiore of the Shire may be quoted.

‘This’, he says, ‘is the one art that we can certainly claim to be our own invention. When Hobbits first began to smoke is not known, all the legends and family histories take it for granted; for ages folk in the Shire smoked various herbs, some fouler, some sweeter. But all accounts agree that Tobold Hornblower of Longbottom in the Southfarthing first grew the true pipe-weed in his gardens in the days of Isengrim the Second, about the year 1070 of Shire-reckoning. The best home-grown still comes from that district, especially the varieties now known as Longbottom Leaf, Old Toby, and Southern Star.

‘How Old Toby came by the plant is not recorded, for to his dying day he would not tell. He knew much about herbs, but he was no traveller. It is said that in his youth he went often to Bree, though he certainly never went further from the Shire than that. It is thus quite possible that he learned of this plant in Bree, where now, at any rate, it grows well on the south slopes of the hill. The Bree-hobbits claim to have been the first actual smokers of the pipe-weed. They claim, of course, to have done everything before the people of the Shire, whom they refer to as ‘colonists’; but in this case their claim is, I think, likely to be true. And certainly it was from Bree that the art of smoking the genuine weed spread in the recent centuries among 12

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Dwarves and such other folk, Rangers, Wizards, or wanderers, as still passed to and fro through that ancient road-meeting. The home and centre of the an is thus to be found in the old inn of Bree, The Prancing Pony, that has been kept by the family of Butterbur from time beyond record.

‘All the same, observations that I have made on my own many journeys south have convinced me that the weed itself is not native to our parts of the world, but came northward from the lower Anduin, whither it was, I suspect, originally brought over Sea by the Men of Westernesse. It grows abundantly in Gondor, and there is richer and larger than in the North, where it is never found wild, and flourishes only in warm sheltered places like Longbottom. The Men of Gondor call it sweet galenas, and esteem it only for the fragrance of its flowers. From that land it must have been carried up the Greenway during the long centuries between the coming of Elendil and our own day. But even the Dúnedain of

between the coming of Erendur and our own day. But even the Dunedain of Gondor allow us this credit: Hobbits first put it into pipes. Not even the Wizards first thought of that before we did. Though one Wizard that I knew took up the art long ago, and became as skilful in it as in all other things that he put his mind to.'

3. Of the Ordering of the Shire

The Shire was divided into four quarters, the Farthings already referred to. North, South, East, and West; and these again each into a number of folklands, which still bore the names of some of the old leading families, although by the time of this history these names were no longer found only in their proper folklands. Nearly all Took still lived in the Tookland, but that was not true of many other families, such as the Bagginses or the Boffins. Outside the Farthings were the East and West Marches: the Buckland (see beginning of Chapter V, Book I); and the Westmarch added to the Shire in S.R. 1462.

The Shire at this time had hardly any 'government'. Families for the most part managed their own affairs. Growing food and eating it occupied most of their time. In other matters they were, as a rule, generous and not greedy, but contented and moderate, so that estates, farms, workshops, and small trades tended to remain unchanged for generations. There remained, of course, the ancient tradition concerning the high king at Fornost, or Norbury as they called it, away north of the Shire. But there had been no king for nearly a thousand years, and even the ruins of Kings' Norbury were covered with grass. Yet the Hobbits still said of wild folk and wicked things (such as trolls) that they had not heard of the king. For they attributed to the king of old all their essential laws; and usually 13

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they kept the laws of free will, because they were The Rules (as they said), both ancient and just.

It is true that the Took family had long been pre-eminent; for the office of Thain had passed to them (from the Oldbucks) some centuries before, and the chief Took had borne that title ever since. The Thain was the master of the Shire-moot. and captain of the Shire-muster and the Hobbitry-in-arms. but as muster

and moot were only held in times of emergency, which no longer occurred, the Thainship had ceased to be more than a nominal dignity. The Took family was still, indeed, accorded a special respect, for it remained both numerous and exceedingly wealthy, and was liable to produce in every generation strong characters of peculiar habits and even adventurous temperament. The latter qualities, however, were now rather tolerated (in the rich) than generally approved. The custom endured, nonetheless, of referring to the head of the family as The Took, and of adding to his name, if required, a number: such as Isengrim the Second, for instance.

The only real official in the Shire at this date was the Mayor of Michel Delving (or of the Shire), who was elected every seven years at the Free Fair on the White Downs at the Lithe, that is at Midsummer. As mayor almost his only duty was to preside at banquets, given on the Shire-holidays, which occurred at frequent intervals. But the offices of Postmaster and First Shirriff were attached to the mayoralty, so that he managed both the Messenger Service and the Watch. These were the only Shire-services, and the Messengers were the most numerous, and much the busier of the two. By no means all Hobbits were lettered, but those who were wrote constantly to all their friends (and a selection of their relations) who lived further off than an afternoon's walk. The Shirriffs was the name that the Hobbits gave to their police, or the nearest equivalent that they possessed. They had, of course, no uniforms (such things being quite unknown), only a feather in their caps; and they were in practice rather haywards than policemen, more concerned with the strayings of beasts than of people. There were in all the Shire only twelve of them, three in each Farthing, for Inside Work. A rather larger body, varying at need, was employed to 'beat the bounds', and to see that Outsiders of any kind, great or small, did not make themselves a nuisance. At the time when this story begins the Bounders, as they were called, had been greatly increased. There were many reports and complaints of strange persons and creatures prowling about the borders, or over them: the first sign that all was not quite as it should be, and always had been except in tales and legends of long ago. Few heeded the sign, and not even 14

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Bilbo yet had any notion of what it portended. Sixty years had passed since he set out on his memorable journey, and he was old even for Hobbits, who reached a hundred as often as not, but much evidently still remained of the considerable

a hundred as often as not; but much evidently still remained of the considerable wealth that he had brought back. How much or how little he revealed to no one, not even to Frodo his favourite 'nephew'. And he still kept secret the ring that he had found.

4. Of the Finding of the Ring

As is told in *The Hobbit*, there came one day to Bilbo's door the great Wizard, Gandalf the Grey, and thirteen dwarves with him: none other, indeed, than Thorin Oakenshield, descendant of kings, and his twelve companions in exile. With them he set out, to his own lasting astonishment, on a morning of April, it being then the year 1341 Shire-reckoning, on a quest of great treasure, the dwarf-hoards of the Kings under the Mountain, beneath Erebor in Dale, far off in the East. The quest was successful, and the Dragon that guarded the hoard was destroyed. Yet, though before all was won the Battle of Five Armies was fought, and Thorin was slain, and many deeds of renown were done, the matter would scarcely have concerned later history, or earned more than a note in the long annals of the Third Age, but for an 'accident' by the way. The party was assailed by Orcs in a high pass of the Misty Mountains as they went towards Wilderland; and so it happened that Bilbo was lost for a while in the black orc-mines deep under the mountains, and there, as he groped in vain in the dark, he put his hand on a ring, lying on the floor of a tunnel. He put it in his pocket. It seemed then like mere luck.

Trying to find his way out. Bilbo went on down to the roots of the mountains, until he could go no further. At the bottom of the tunnel lay a cold lake far from the light, and on an island of rock in the water lived Gollum. He was a loathsome little creature: he paddled a small boat with his large flat feet, peering with pale luminous eyes and catching blind fish with his long fingers, and eating them raw. He ate any living thing, even orc, if he could catch it and strangle it without a struggle. He possessed a secret treasure that had come to him long ages ago, when he still lived in the light: a ring of gold that made its wearer invisible. It was the one thing he loved, his 'precious', and he talked to it, even when it was not with him. For he kept it hidden safe in a hole on his island, except when he was hunting or spying on the ores of the mines.

Maybe he would have attacked Bilbo at once, if the ring had been on him when they met; but it was not, and the hobbit held in his hand an 15

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Elvish knife, which served him as a sword. So to gain time Gollum challenged Bilbo to the Riddle-game, saying that if he asked a riddle which Bilbo could not guess, then he would kill him and eat him; but if Bilbo defeated him, then he would do as Bilbo wished: he would lead him to a way out of the tunnels.

Since he was lost in the dark without hope, and could neither go on nor back. Bilbo accepted the challenge; and they asked one another many riddles. In the end Bilbo won the game, more by luck (as it seemed) than by wits; for he was stumped at last for a riddle to ask, and cried out, as his hand came upon the ring he had picked up and forgotten: What have I got in my pocket? This Gollum failed to answer, though he demanded three guesses.

The Authorities, it is true, differ whether this last question was a mere

‘question’ and not a ‘riddle’ according to the strict rules of the Game; but all agree that, after accepting it and trying to guess the answer, Gollum was bound by his promise. And Bilbo pressed him to keep his word; for the thought came to him that this slimy creature might prove false, even though such promises were held sacred, and of old all but the wickedest things feared to break them. But after ages alone in the dark Gollum’s heart was black, and treachery was in it. He slipped away, and returned to the island, of which Bilbo knew nothing, not far off in the dark water. There, he thought, lay his ring. He was hungry now, and angry, and once his ‘precious’

was with him he would not fear any weapon at all.

But the ring was not on the island; he had lost it, it was gone. His screech sent a shiver down Bilbo’s back, though he did not yet understand what had happened. But Gollum had at last leaped to a guess, too late. What has it got in its pockets? he cried. The light in his eyes was like a green flame as he sped back to murder the hobbit and recover his ‘precious’. Just in time Bilbo saw his peril, and he fled blindly up the passage away from the water; and once more he was saved by his luck. For just as he ran he put his hand in his pocket, and the ring slipped quietly on to his finger. So it was that Gollum passed him without seeing him, and went to guard the way out, lest the ‘thief’ should escape. Warily Bilbo followed him, as he went along, cursing, and talking to himself about his ‘precious’: from which talk at last even Bilbo guessed the truth, and hence came

precious, from which talk at last even Bilbo guessed the truth, and hope came to him in the darkness: he himself had found the marvellous ring and a chance of escape from the orcs and from Gollum.

At length they came to a halt before an unseen opening that led to the lower gates of the mines, on the eastward side of the mountains. There Gollum crouched at bay, smelling and listening; and Bilbo was tempted to 16

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slay him with his sword. But pity stayed him, and though he kept the ring, in which his only hope lay, he would not use it to help him kill the wretched creature at a disadvantage. In the end, gathering his courage, he leaped over Gollum in the dark, and fled away down the passage, pursued by his enemy's cries of hate and despair: Thief, thief! Baggins! We hates it for ever!

Now it is a curious fact that this is not the story as Bilbo first told it to his companions. To them his account was that Gollum had promised to give him a present, if he won the game; but when Gollum went to fetch it from his island he found the treasure was gone: a magic ring, which had been given to him long ago on his birthday. Bilbo guessed that this was the very ring that he had found, and as he had won the game, it was already his by right. But being in a tight place, he said nothing about it, and made Gollum show him the way out, as a reward instead of a present. This account Bilbo set down in his memoirs, and he seems never to have altered it himself, not even after the Council of Elrond. Evidently it still appeared in the original Red Book, as it did in several of the copies and abstracts. But many copies contain the true account (as an alternative), derived no doubt from notes by Frodo or Samwise, both of whom learned the truth, though they seem to have been unwilling to delete anything actually written by the old hobbit himself.

Gandalf, however, disbelieved Bilbo's first story, as soon as he heard it, and he continued to be very curious about the ring. Eventually he got the true tale out of Bilbo after much questioning, which for a while strained their friendship; but the wizard seemed to think the truth important. Though he did not say so to Bilbo, he also thought it important, and disturbing, to find that the good hobbit had not told the truth from the first: quite contrary to his habit. The idea of a 'present' was not mere hobbitlike invention, all the same. It was suggested to Bilbo, as he confessed, by Gollum's talk that he overheard; for Gollum did, in fact, call the

conferred, by Gollum's talk that he overheard; for Gollum did, in fact, call the ring his

'birthday present', many times. That also Gandalf thought strange and suspicious; but he did not discover the truth in this point for many more years, as will be seen in this book.

Of Bilbo's later adventures little more need be said here. With the help of the ring he escaped from the orc-guards at the gate and rejoined his companions. He used the ring many times on his quest, chiefly for the help of his friends; but he kept it secret from them as long as he could. After his return to his home he never spoke of it again to anyone, save Gandalf and Frodo; and no one else in the Shire knew of its existence, or so he believed. Only to Frodo did he show the account of his Journey that he was writing.

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His sword, Sting, Bilbo hung over his fireplace, and his coat of marvellous mail, the gift of the Dwarves from the Dragon-hoard, he lent to a museum, to the Michel Delving Mathom-house in fact. But he kept in a drawer at Bag End the old cloak and hood that he had worn on his travels; and the ring, secured by a fine chain, remained in his pocket. He returned to his home at Bag End on June the 22nd in his fifty-second year (S.R. 1342), and nothing very notable occurred in the Shire until Mr. Baggins began the preparations for the celebration of his hundred-and-eleventh birthday (S.R. 1401). At this point this History begins.

Note on the Shire Records

At the end of the Third Age the part played by the Hobbits in the great events that led to the inclusion of the Shire in the Reunited Kingdom awakened among them a more widespread interest in their own history; and many of their traditions, up to that time still mainly oral, were collected and written down. The greater families were also concerned with events in the Kingdom at large, and many of their members studied its ancient histories and legends. By the end of the first century of the Fourth Age there were already to be found in the Shire several libraries that contained many historical books and records. The largest of these collections were probably at Undertowers, at Great Smials, and at Brandy Hall. This account of the end of the Third Age is drawn mainly from the Red

fact. This account of the end of the Third Age is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch. That most important source for the history of the War of the Ring was so called because it was long preserved at Undertowers, the home of the Fairbairns, Wardens of the Westmarch. It was in origin Bilbo's private diary, which he took with him to Rivendell. Frodo brought it back to the Shire, together with many loose leaves of notes, and during S.R. 1420-1 he nearly filled its pages with his account of the War. But annexed to it and preserved with it, probably in a single red case, were the three large volumes, bound in red leather, that Bilbo gave to him as a parting gift. To these four volumes there was added in Westmarch a fifth containing commentaries, genealogies, and various other matter concerning the hobbit members of the Fellowship. The original Red Book has not been preserved, but many copies were made, especially of the first volume, for the use of the descendants of the children of Master Samwise. The most important copy, however, has a different history. It was kept at Great Smials, but it was written in Condor, probably at the request of the great-grandson of Peregrin, and completed in S.R. 1592 (F.A. 172). Its southern scribe appended this note: Findegil, 18

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King's Writer, finished this work in IV 172. It is an exact copy in all details of the Thain's Book in Minas Tirith. That book was a copy, made at the request of King Elessar, of the Red Book of the Periannath, and was brought to him by the Thain Peregrin when he retired to Gondor in IV 64. The Thain's Book was thus the first copy made of the Red Book and contained much that was later omitted or lost. In Minas Tirith it received much annotation, and many corrections, especially of names, words, and quotations in the Elvish languages; and there was added to it an abbreviated version of those parts of The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen which lie outside the account of the War. The full tale is stated to have been written by Barahir, grandson of the Steward Faramir, some time after the passing of the King. But the chief importance of Findegil's copy is that it alone contains the whole of Bilbo's 'Translations from the Elvish'. These three volumes were found to be a work of great skill and learning in which, between 1403 and 1418, he had used all the sources available to him in Rivendell, both living and written. But since they were little used by Frodo, being almost entirely concerned with the Elder Days, no more is said of them here.

Since Meriadoc and Peregrin became the heads of their great families, and at the

same time kept up their connexions with Rohan and Gondor, the libraries at Bucklebury and Tuckborough contained much that did not appear in the Red Book. In Brandy Hall there were many works dealing with Eriador and the history of Rohan. Some of these were composed or begun by Meriadoc himself, though in the Shire he was chiefly remembered for his Herblore of the Shire, and for his Reckoning of Years in which he discussed the relation of the calendars of the Shire and Bree to those of Rivendell, Gondor, and Rohan. He also wrote a short treatise on Old Words and Names in the Shire, having special interest in discovering the kinship with the language of the Rohirrim of such 'shire-words' as mathom and old elements in place names.

At Great Smials the books were of less interest to Shire-folk, though more important for larger history. None of them was written by Peregrin, but he and his successors collected many manuscripts written by scribes of Gondor: mainly copies or summaries of histories or legends relating to Elendil and his heirs. Only here in the Shire were to be found extensive materials for the history of Númenor and the arising of Sauron. It was probably at Great Smials that The Tale of Years was put together, with the assistance of material collected by Meriadoc. Though the dates given are often conjectural, especially for the Second Age, they deserve attention. It is probable that Meriadoc obtained assistance and information from 19

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Rivendell, which he visited more than once. There, though Elrond had departed, his sons long remained, together with some of the High-elven folk. It is said that Celeborn went to dwell there after the departure of Galadriel; but there is no record of the day when at last he sought the Grey Havens, and with him went the last living memory of the Elder Days in Middle-earth.

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AWAKE! FEAR! FIRE! FOES!

AWAKE!

Fatty Bolger had not been idle. As soon as he saw the dark shapes creep from the garden, he knew that he must run for it, or perish. And run he did, out of the back door, through the garden, and over the fields. When he reached the nearest house, more than a mile away, he collapsed on the doorstep. 'No, no, no!' he was crying. 'No, not me! I haven't got it!' It was some time before anyone could make out what he was babbling about. At last they got the idea that enemies were in Buckland, some strange invasion from the Old Forest. And then they lost no more time.

FEAR! FIRE! FOES!

The Brandybucks were blowing the Horn-call of Buckland, that had not been sounded for a hundred years, not since the white wolves came in the Fell Winter, when the Brandywine was frozen over.

‘I was wrong after all’, said Gandalf, ‘and Gimli too. Merry, of all people, was on the right track. The opening word was inscribed on the archway all the time! The translation should have been: Say ‘*Friend*’ and *enter*. I had only to speak the Elvish word for *friend* and the doors opened. Quite simple. Too simple for a learned lore-master in these suspicious days. Those were happier times. Now let us go!’

He strode forward and set his foot on the lowest step. But at that moment several things happened. Frodo felt something seize him by the ankle, and he fell with a cry. Bill *The Pony* gave a wild neigh of fear, and turned tail and dashed away along the lakeside into the darkness. Sam leaped after him, and then hearing Frodo’s cry he ran back again, weeping and cursing. The others swung round and saw the waters of the lake seething, as if a host of snakes were swimming up from the southern end.

Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was palegreen and luminous and wet. Its fingered end had hold of Frodo’s foot and was dragging him into the water. Sam on his knees was now slashing at it with a knife.

The arm let go of Frodo, and Sam pulled him away, crying out for help. Twenty others arms came rippling out. The dark water boiled, and there was a hideous stench.

‘Into the gateway! Up the stairs! Quick!’ shouted Gandalf leaping back. Rousing them from the horror that seemed to have rooted all but Sam to the ground where they stood, he drove them forward. They were just in time. Sam and Frodo were only a few steps up, and Gandalf had just begun to climb, when the groping tentacles writhed across the narrow shore and fingered the cliff-wall and the doors. One came wriggling over the threshold, glistening in the starlight. Gandalf turned and paused. If he was considering what word would close the gate again from within, there was no need. Many coiling arms seized the doors on either side, and with horrible strength, swung them round. With a shattering echo they slammed, and all light was lost. A noise of rending and crashing came dully through the ponderous stone.

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Sam, clinging to Frodo's arm, collapsed on a step in the black darkness. 'Poor old Bill!' he said in a choking voice. 'Poor old Bill! Wolves and snakes! But the snakes were too much for him. I had to choose, Mr. Frodo. I had to come with you.'

They heard Gandalf go back down the steps and thrust his staff against the doors. There was a quiver in the stone and the stairs trembled,

.but the doors did not open. 'Well, well!' said the wizard. 'The passage is blocked behind us now and there is only one way out—on the other side of the mountains. I fear from the sounds that boulders have been piled up, and the trees uprooted and thrown across the gate. I am sorry; for the trees were beautiful, and had stood so long.'

'I felt that something horrible was near from the moment that my foot first touched the water', said Frodo. 'What was the thing, or were there many of them?

'I do not know', answered Gandalf, 'but the arms were all guided by one purpose. Something has crept, or has been driven out of dark waters under the mountains. There are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world.' He did not speak aloud his thought that whatever it was that dwelt in the lake, it had seized on Frodo first among all the Company.

Boromir muttered under his breath, but the echoing stone magnified the sound to a hoarse whisper that all could hear: 'In the deep places of the world! And thither we are going against my wish. Who will lead us now in this deadly dark?'

'I will', said Gandalf, 'and Gimli shall walk with me. Follow my staff!'

As the wizard passed on ahead up the great steps, he held his staff aloft, and from its tip there came a faint radiance. The wide stairway was sound and undamaged. Two hundred steps they counted, broad and shallow; and at the top they found an arched passage with a level floor leading on into the dark.

'Let us sit and rest and have something to eat, here on the landing, since we can't find a dining-room!' said Frodo. He had begun to shake off the terror of the clutching arm, and suddenly he felt extremely hungry. The proposal was

welcomed by all; and they sat down on the upper steps, dim figures in the gloom. After they had eaten, Gandalf gave them each a third sip of the miruvor of Rivendell.

‘It will not last much longer, I am afraid’, he said; ‘but I think we need it after that horror at the gate. And unless we have great luck, we shall need all that is left before we see the other side! Go carefully with the water, too!’

There are many streams and wells in the Mines, but they should not be 314

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touched. We may not have a chance of filling our skins and bottles till we come down into Dimrill Dale.’

‘How long is that going to take us?’ asked Frodo.

‘I cannot say’, answered Gandalf. ‘It depends on many chances. But going straight, without mishap or losing our way, we shall take three or four marches, I expect. It cannot be less than forty miles from West-door to East-gate in a direct line, and the road may wind much.’

After only a brief rest they started on their way again. All were eager to get the journey over as quickly as possible, and were willing, tired as they were, to go on marching still for several hours. Gandalf walked in front as before. In his left hand he held up his glimmering staff, the light of which just showed the ground before his feet; in his right he held his sword Glamdring. Behind him came Gimli, his eyes glinting in the dim light as he turned his head from side to side. Behind the dwarf walked Frodo, and he had drawn the short sword, Sting. No gleam came from the blades of Sting or of Glamdring; and that was some comfort, for being the work of Elvish smiths in the Elder Days these swords shone with a cold light, if any Orcs were near at hand. Behind Frodo went Sam, and after him Legolas, and the young hobbits, and Boromir. In the dark at the rear, grim and silent, walked Aragorn.

The passage twisted round a few turns, and then began to descend. It went steadily down for a long while before it became level once again. The air grew hot and stifling, but it was not foul, and at times they felt currents of cooler air upon their faces issuing from half-guessed openings in the walls. There were

upon their faces, issuing from half-guessed openings in the walls. There were many of these. In the pale ray of the wizard's staff, Frodo caught glimpses of stairs and arches and of other passages and tunnels, sloping up, or running steeply down, or opening blankly dark on either side. It was bewildering beyond hope of remembering.

Gimli aided Gandalf very little, except by his stout courage. At least he was not, as were most of the others, troubled by the mere darkness in itself. Often the wizard consulted him at points where the choice of way was doubtful; but it was always Gandalf who had the final word. The Mines of Moria were vast and intricate beyond the imagination of Gimli, Glóin's son, dwarf of the mountain-race though he was. To Gandalf the far-off memories of a journey long before were now of little help, but even in the gloom and despite all windings of the road he knew whither he wished to go, and he did not falter, as long as there was a path that led towards his goal.

'Do not be afraid!' said Aragorn. There was a pause longer than usual, and Gandalf and Gimli were whispering together; the others were crowded 315

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behind, waiting anxiously. 'Do not be afraid! I have been with him on many a journey, if never on one so dark; and there are tales of Rivendell of greater deeds of his than any that I have seen. He will not go astray-if there is any path to find. He has led us in here against our fears, but he will lead us out again, at whatever cost to himself. He is surer of finding the way home in a blind night than the cats of Queen Berúthiel.'

It was well for the Company that they had such a guide. They had no fuel nor any means of making torches; in the desperate scramble at the doors many things had been left behind. But without any light they would soon have come to grief. There were not only many roads to choose from, there were also in many places holes and pitfalls, and dark wells beside the path in which their passing feet echoed. There were fissures and chasms in the walls and floor, and every now and then a crack would open right before their feet. The widest was more than seven feet across, and it was long before Pippin could summon enough courage to leap over the dreadful gap. The noise of churning water came up from far below, as if some great mill-wheel was turning in the depths.

‘Rope!’ muttered Sam. ‘I knew I’d want it, if I hadn’t got it!’

As these dangers became more frequent their march became slower. Already they seemed to have been tramping on, on, endlessly to the mountains’ roots. They were more than weary, and yet there seemed no comfort in the thought of halting anywhere. Frodo’s spirits had risen for a while after his escape, and after food and a draught of the cordial; but now a deep uneasiness, growing to dread, crept over him again. Though he had been healed in Rivendell of the knife-stroke, that grim wound had not been without effect. His senses were sharper and more aware of things that could not be seen. One sign of change that he soon had noticed was that he could see more in the dark than any of his companions, save perhaps Gandalf. And he was in any case the bearer of the Ring: it hung upon its chain against his breast, and at times it seemed a heavy weight. He felt the certainty of evil ahead and of evil following; but he said nothing. He gripped tighter on the hilt of his sword and went on doggedly.

The Company behind him spoke seldom, and then only in hurried whispers. There was no sound but the sound of their own feet; the dull stump of Gimli’s dwarf-boots; the heavy tread of Boromir; the light step of Legolas; the soft, scarce-heard patter of hobbit-feet; and in the rear the slow firm footfalls of Aragorn with his long stride. When they halted for a moment they heard nothing at all, unless it were occasionally a faint trickle and drip of unseen water. Yet Frodo began to hear, or to imagine that he 316

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heard, something else: like the faint fall of soft bare feet. It was never loud enough, or near enough, for him to feel certain that he heard it; but once it had started it never stopped, while the Company was moving. But it was not an echo, for when they halted it pattered on for a little all by itself, and then grew still.

It was after nightfall when they had entered the Mines. They had been going for several hours with only brief halts, when Gandalf came to his first serious check. Before him stood a wide dark arch opening into three passages: all led in the same general direction, eastwards; but the left-hand passage plunged down, while the right-hand climbed up, and the middle way seemed to run on, smooth and level but very narrow.

‘I have no memory of this place at all!’ said Gandalf, standing uncertainly under the arch. He held up his staff in the hope of finding some marks or inscription that might help his choice; but nothing of the kind was to be seen. ‘I am too weary to decide’, he said, shaking his head. ‘And I expect that you are all as weary as I am, or wearier. We had better halt here for what is left of the night. You know what I mean! In here it is ever dark; but outside the late Moon is riding westward and the middle-night has passed.’

‘Poor old Bill!’ said Sam. ‘I wonder where he is. I hope those wolves haven’t got him yet.’

To the left of the great arch they found a stone door: it was half closed, but swung back easily to a gentle thrust. Beyond there seemed to lie a wide chamber cut in the rock.

‘Steady! Steady!’ cried Gandalf as Merry and Pippin pushed forward, glad to find a place where they could rest with at least more feeling of shelter than in the open passage. ‘Steady! You do not know what is inside yet. I will go first.’

He went in cautiously, and the others filed behind. ‘There!’ he said, pointing with his staff to the middle of the floor. Before his feet they saw a large round hole like the mouth of a well. Broken and rusty chains lay at the edge and trailed down into the black pit. Fragments of stone lay near.

‘One of you might have fallen in and still be wondering when you were going to strike the bottom’, said Aragorn to Merry. ‘Let the guide go first while you have one.’

‘This seems to have been a guardroom, made for the watching of the three passages’, said Gimli. ‘That hole was plainly a well for the guards’ use, covered with a stone lid. But the lid is broken, and we must all take care in the dark.’

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Pippin felt curiously attracted by the well. While the others were unrolling

blankets and making beds against the walls of the chamber, as far as possible from the hole in the floor, he crept to the edge and peered over. A chill air seemed to strike his face, rising from invisible depths. Moved by a sudden impulse he groped for a loose stone, and let it drop. He felt his heart beat many times before there was any sound. Then far below, as if the stone had fallen into deep water in some cavernous place, there came a *plunk*, very distant, but magnified and repeated in the hollow shaft.

‘What’s that?’ cried Gandalf. He was relieved when Pippin confessed what he had done; but he was angry, and Pippin could see his eye glinting.

‘Fool of a Took!’ he growled. ‘This is a serious journey, not a hobbit walking-party. Throw yourself in next time, and then you will be no further nuisance. Now be quiet!’

Nothing more was heard for several minutes; but then there came out of the depths faint knocks: tom-tap, tap-tom. They stopped, and when the echoes had died away, they were repeated: *tap-tom, tom-tap, tap-tap, tom*. They sounded disquietingly like signals of some sort; but after a while the knocking died away and was not heard again.

‘That was the sound of a hammer, or I have never heard one’, said Gimli.

‘Yes’, said Gandalf, ‘and I do not like it. It may have nothing to do with Peregrin’s foolish stone; but probably something has been disturbed that would have been better left quiet. Pray, do nothing of the kind again! Let us hope we shall get some rest without further trouble. You, Pippin, can go on the first watch, as a reward’, he growled, as he rolled himself in a blanket. Pippin sat miserably by the door in the pitch dark; but he kept on turning round, fearing that some unknown thing would crawl up out of the well. He wished he could cover the hole, if only with a blanket, but he dared not move or go near it, even though Gandalf seemed to be asleep. Actually Gandalf was awake, though lying still and silent. He was deep in thought, trying to recall every memory of his former journey in the Mines, and considering anxiously the next course that he should take; a false turn now might be disastrous. After an hour he rose up and came over to Pippin.

‘Get into a corner and have a sleep, my lad’, he said in a kindly tone.

‘You want to sleep, I expect. I cannot get a wink, so I may as well do the

watching.'

'I know what is the matter with me', he muttered, as he sat down by the door. 'I need smoke! I have not tasted it since the morning before the snowstorm.'

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The last thing that Pippin saw, as sleep took him, was a dark glimpse of the old wizard huddled on the floor, shielding a glowing chip in his gnarled hands between his knees. The flicker for a moment showed his sharp nose, and the puff of smoke.

It was Gandalf who roused them all from sleep. He had sat and watched all alone for about six hours, and had let the others rest. 'And in the watches I have made up my mind', he said. 'I do not like the feel of the middle way; and I do not like the smell of the left-hand way: there is foul air down there, or I am no guide. I shall take the right-hand passage. It is time we began to climb up again.'

For eight dark hours, not counting two brief halts, they marched on; and they met no danger, and heard nothing, and saw nothing but the faint gleam of the wizard's light, bobbing like a will-o'-the-wisp in front of them. The passage they had chosen wound steadily upwards. As far as they could judge it went in great mounting curves, and as it rose it grew loftier and wider. There were now no openings to other galleries or tunnels on either side, and the floor was level and sound, without pits or cracks. Evidently they had struck what once had been an important road; and they went forward quicker than they had done on their first march. In this way they advanced some fifteen miles, measured in a direct line east, though they must have actually walked twenty miles or more. As the road climbed upwards, Frodo's spirits rose a little; but he still felt oppressed, and still at times he heard, or thought he heard, away behind the Company and beyond the fall and patter of their feet, a following footstep that was not an echo.

They had marched as far as the hobbits could endure without a rest, and all were thinking of a place where they could sleep, when suddenly the walls to right and left vanished. They seemed to have passed through some arched doorway into a black and empty space. There was a great draught of warmer air behind them

black and empty space. There was a great draught or warmer air behind them, and before them the darkness was cold on their faces. They halted and crowded anxiously together.

Gandalf seemed pleased. 'I chose the right way', he said. 'At last we are coming to the habitable parts, and I guess that we are not far now from the eastern side. But we are high up, a good deal higher than the Dimrill Gate, unless I am mistaken. From the feeling of the air we must be in a wide hall. I will now risk a little real light.'

He raised his staff, and for a brief instant there was blaze like a flash of lightning. Great shadows sprang up and fled, and for a second they saw a vast roof far above their heads upheld by many mighty pillars hewn of stone. Before them and on either side stretched a huge empty hall; its black

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walls, polished and smooth as glass, flashed and glittered. Three other entrances they saw, dark black arches: one straight before them eastwards, and one on either side. Then the light went out.

'That is all that I shall venture on for the present', said Gandalf. 'There used to be great windows on the mountain-side, and shafts leading out to the light in the upper reaches of the Mines. I think we have reached them now, but it is night outside again, and we cannot tell until morning. If I am right, tomorrow we may actually see the morning peeping in. But in the meanwhile we had better go no further. Let us rest, if we can. Things have gone well so far, and the greater part of the dark road is over. But we are not through yet, and it is a long way down to the Gates that open on the world.'

The Company spent that night in the great cavernous hall, huddled close together in a corner to escape the draught: there seemed to be a steady inflow of chill air through the eastern archway. All about them as they lay hung the darkness, hollow and immense, and they were oppressed by the loneliness and vastness of the dolven halls and endlessly branching stairs and passages. The wildest imaginings that dark rumour had ever suggested to the hobbits fell altogether short of the actual dread and wonder of Moria.

'There must have been a mighty crowd of dwarves here at one time'

There must have been a mighty crowd of dwarves here at one time

said Sam; ‘and every one of them busier than badgers for five hundred years to make all this, and most in hard rock too! What did they do it all for? They didn’t live in these darksome holes surely?’

‘These are not holes’, said Gimli. ‘This is the great realm and city of the Dwarrowdelf. And of old it was not darksome, but full of light and splendour, as is still remembered in our songs.’

He rose and standing in the dark he began to chant in a deep voice, while the echoes ran away into the roof.

The world was young, the mountains green,

No stain yet on the Moon was seen,

No words were laid on stream or stone

When Durin woke and walked alone.

He named the nameless hills and dells;

He drank from yet untasted wells;

He stooped and looked in Mirrormere,

And saw a crown of stars appear,

As gems upon a silver thread,

Above the shadow of his head.

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The world was fair, the mountains tall,

*In Elder Days before the fall
Of mighty kings in Nargothrond
And Gondolin, who now beyond
The Western Seas have passed away:
The world was fair in Durin's Day.
A king he was on carven throne
In many-pillared halls of stone
With golden roof and silver floor,
And runes of power upon the door.
The light of sun and star and moon
In shining lamps of crystal hewn
Undimmed by cloud or shade of night
There shone for ever fair and bright.
There hammer on the anvil smote,
There chisel clove, and graver wrote;
There forged was blade, and bound was hilt;
The delver mined, the mason built.
There beryl, pearl, and opal pale,
And metal wrought like fishes' mail,
Buckler and corslet, axe and sword,
And shining spears were laid in hoard.*

*Unwearied then were Durin's folk
Beneath the mountains music woke:
The harpers harped, the minstrels sang,
And at the gates the trumpets rang.
The world is grey, the mountains old,
The forge's fire is ashen-cold
No harp is wrung, no hammer falls:
The darkness dwells in Durin's halls
The shadow lies upon his tomb
In Moria, in Khazad-dûm.
But still the sunken stars appear
In dark and windless Mirrormere;
There lies his crown in water deep,
Till Durin wakes again from sleep.*

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‘I like that!’ said Sam. ‘I should like to learn it. *In Moria, in Khazad-dûm!*

But it makes the darkness seem heavier, thinking of all those lamps. Are there piles of jewels and gold lying about here still?’

Gimli was silent. Having sung his song he would say no more.

‘Piles of jewels?’ said Gandalf. ‘No. The Orcs have often plundered Moria; there is nothing left in the upper halls. And since the dwarves fled, no one dares to seek the shafts and treasures down in the deep places: they are drowned in water—or in a shadow of fear.’

‘Then what do the dwarves want to come back for?’ asked Sam.

‘For *mithril*’, answered Gandalf. ‘The wealth of Moria was not in gold and jewels, the toys of the Dwarves; nor in iron, their servant. Such things they found here, it is true, especially iron; but they did not need to delve for them: all things that they desired they could obtain in traffic. For here alone in the world was found Moria-silver, or truesilver as some have called it: *mithril* is the Elvish name. The Dwarves have a name which they do not tell. Its worth was ten times that of gold, and now it is beyond price; for little is left above ground, and even the Orcs dare not delve here for it. The lodes lead away north towards Caradhras, and down to darkness. The Dwarves tell no tale; but even as *mithril* was the foundation of their wealth, so also it was their destruction: they delved too greedily and too deep, and disturbed that from which they fled, Durin’s Bane. Of what they brought to light the Orcs have gathered nearly all, and given it in tribute to Sauron, who covets it.

‘*Mithril!* All folk desired it. It could be beaten like copper, and polished like glass; and the Dwarves could make of it a metal, light and yet harder than tempered steel. Its beauty was like to that of common silver, but the beauty of *mithril* did not tarnish or grow dim. The Elves dearly loved it, and among many uses they made of it *mithril*, starmoon, which you saw upon the doors. Bilbo had a corslet of *mithril*-rings that Thorin gave him. I wonder what has become of it? Gathering dust still in Michel Delving Mathomhouse, I suppose.’

‘What?’ cried Gimli, startled out of his silence. ‘A corslet of Moria-silver? That was a kingly gift!’

‘Yes’, said Gandalf. ‘I never told him, but its worth was greater than the value of the whole Shire and everything in it.’

Frodo said nothing, but he put his hand under his tunic and touched the rings of his mail-shirt. He felt staggered to think that he had been walking about with the price of the Shire under his jacket. Had Bilbo known?

He felt no doubt that Bilbo knew quite well. It was indeed a kingly gift. But now

his thoughts had been carried away from the dark Mines, to Rivendell, 322

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to Bilbo, and to Bag End in the days while Bilbo was still there. He wished with all his heart that he was back there, and in those days, mowing the lawn, or pottering among the flowers, and that he had never heard of Moria, or *mithril* -or the Ring.

A deep silence fell. One by one the others fell asleep. Frodo was on guard. As if it were a breath that came in through unseen doors out of deep places, dread came over him. His hands were cold and his brow damp. He listened. All his mind was given to listening and nothing else for two slow hours; but he heard no sound, not even the imagined echo of a footfall. His watch was nearly over, when, far off where he guessed that the western archway stood, he fancied that he could see two pale points of light, almost like luminous eyes. He started. His head had nodded. 'I must have nearly fallen asleep on guard', he thought. 'I was on the edge of a dream.' He stood up and rubbed his eyes, and remained standing, peering into the dark, until he was relieved by Legolas.

When he lay down he quickly went to sleep, but it seemed to him that the dream went on: he heard whispers, and saw the two pale points of light approaching, slowly. He woke and found that the others were speaking softly near him, and that a dim light was falling on his face. High up above the eastern archway through a shaft near the roof came a long pale gleam; and across the hall through the northern arch light also glimmered faint and distantly. Frodo sat up. 'Good morning!' said Gandalf: 'For morning it is again at last. I was right, you see. We are high up on the east side of Moria. Before today is over we ought to find the Great Gates and see the waters of Mirrormere lying in the Dimrill Dale before us.'

'I shall be glad', said Gimli. 'I have looked on Moria, and it is very great, but it has become dark and dreadful; and we have found no sign of my kindred. I doubt now that Balin ever came here.'

After they had breakfasted Gandalf decided to go on again at once.

'We are tired, but we shall rest better when we are outside', he said. 'I think that

none of us will wish to spend another night in Moria.'

'No indeed!' said Boromir. 'Which way shall we take? Yonder eastward arch?'

'Maybe', said Gandalf. 'But I do not know yet exactly where we are. Unless I am quite astray, I guess that we are above and to the north of the Great Gates; and it may not be easy to find the right road down to them. The eastern arch will probably prove to be the way that we must take; but before we make up our minds we ought to look about us. Let us go towards 323

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that light in the north door. If we could find a window it would help, but I fear that the light comes only down deep shafts.'

Following his lead the Company passed under the northern arch. They found themselves in a wide corridor. As they went along it the glimmer grew stronger, and they saw that it came through a doorway on their right. It was high and flat-topped, and the stone door was still upon its hinges, standing half open. Beyond it was a large square chamber. It was dimly lit, but to their eyes, after so long a time in the dark, it seemed dazzlingly bright, and they blinked as they entered.

Their feet disturbed a deep dust upon the floor, and stumbled among things lying in the doorway whose shapes they could not at first make out. The chamber was lit by a wide shaft high in the further eastern wall; it slanted upwards and, far above, a small square patch of blue sky could be seen. The light of the shaft fell directly on a table in the middle of the room: a single oblong block, about two feet high, upon which was laid a great slab of white stone.

'It looks like a tomb', muttered Frodo, and bent forwards with a curious sense of foreboding, to look more closely at it. Gandalf came quickly to his side. On the slab runes were deeply graven:

'These are Daeron's Runes, such as were used of old in Moria', said Gandalf. 'Here is written in the tongues of Men and Dwarves: balin son of fundin

lord of moria.'

'He is dead then'. said Frodo. 'I feared it was so.' Gimli cast his hood over his

face.

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The Bridge of Khazad-dûm

The Company of the Ring stood silent beside the tomb of Balin. Frodo thought of Bilbo and his long friendship with the dwarf, and of Balin's visit to the Shire long ago. In that dusty chamber in the mountains it seemed a thousand years ago and on the other side of the world. At length they stirred and looked up, and began to search for anything that would give them tidings of Balin's fate, or show what had become of his folk. There was another smaller door on the other side of the chamber, under the shaft. By both the doors they could now see that many bones were lying, and among them were broken swords and axe-heads, and cloven shields and helms. Some of the swords were crooked: orc-scimitars with blackened blades.

There were many recesses cut in the rock of the walls, and in them were large iron-bound chests of wood. All had been broken and plundered; but beside the shattered lid of one there lay the remains of a book. It had been slashed and stabbed and partly burned, and it was so stained with black and other dark marks like old blood that little of it could be read. Gandalf lifted it carefully, but the leaves crackled and broke as he laid it on the slab. He pored over it for some time without speaking. Frodo and Gimli standing at his side could see, as he gingerly turned the leaves, that they were written by many different hands, in runes, both of Moria and of Dale, and here and there in Elvish script.

At last Gandalf looked up. 'It seems to be a record of the fortunes of Balin's folk', he said. 'I guess that it began with their coming to Dimrill Dale nigh on thirty years ago: the pages seem to have numbers referring to the 325

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years after their arrival. The top page is marked one - three, so at least two are missing from the beginning. Listen to this!

'We drove out orcs from the great gate and guard -I think; the next word is blurred and burned; probably room - we slew many in the bright -I think - sun in the dale. Flói was killed by an arrow. He slew the great. Then there is a blur followed by Flói under grass near Mirror mere. The next line or two I cannot read. Then comes We have taken the twentyfirst hall of North end to dwell in. There is I cannot read what. A shaft is mentioned. Then Balin has set up his seat in the Chamber of Mazarbul. '

'The Chamber of Records', said Gimli. 'I guess that is where we now stand.'

'Well, I can read no more for a long way', said Gandalf, 'except the word *gold*, and *Durin's Axe* and something *helm*. Then *Balin is now lord of Moria*. That seems to end a chapter. After some stars another hand begins, and I can see *we found truesilver*, and later the word *wellforged* and then something, I have it! *mithril*; and the last two lines *Óin to seek for the upper armouries of Third Deep*, something *go westwards*, a blur, *to Hollin gate*. '

Gandalf paused and set a few leaves aside. 'There are several pages of the same sort, rather hastily written and much damaged, he said; 'but I can make little of them in this light. Now there must be a number of leaves missing, because they begin to be numbered *five*, the fifth year of the colony, I suppose. Let me see! No, they are too cut and stained; I cannot read them. We might do better in the sunlight. Wait! Here is something: a large bold hand using an Elvish script.'

'That would be Ori's hand', said Gimli, looking over the wizard's arm.

'He could write well and speedily, and often used the Elvish characters.'

'I fear he had ill tidings to record in a fair hand', said Gandalf. 'The first clear word is *sorrow*, but the rest of the line is lost, unless it ends in *estre*. Yes, it must be yestre followed by *day being the tenth of novembre Balin lord of Moria fell in Dimrill Dale. He went alone to look in Mirror mere. an orc shot him from behind a stone. we slew the orc, hut many more ... up from east up the Silverlode*. The remainder of the page is so blurred that I can hardly make anything out, but I think I can read *we have barred the gates*, and then *can hold them long if*, and then perhaps *horrible* and *suffer*. Poor Balin! He seems to have kept the title that he took for less than five years. I wonder what happened

afterwards; but there is no time to puzzle out the last few pages. Here is the last page of all.' He paused and sighed.

'It is grim reading', he said. 'I fear their end was cruel. Listen! *We cannot get out. We cannot get out. They have taken the Bridge and second hall. Frár and Lóni and Náli fell there.* Then there are four lines smeared so that I can only 326

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read went 5 days ago. The last lines run the pool is up to the wall at Westgate. The Watcher in the Water took Óin. We cannot get out. The end comes, and then drums, drums in the deep. I wonder what that means. The last thing written is in a trailing scrawl of elf-letters: *they are coming.* There is nothing more.' Gandalf paused and stood in silent thought.

A sudden dread and a horror of the chamber fell on the Company. '*We cannot get out*', muttered Gimli. 'It was well for us that the pool had sunk a little, and that the Watcher was sleeping down at the southern end.'

Gandalf raised his head and looked round. 'They seem to have made a last stand by both doors', he said; 'but there were not many left by that time. So ended the attempt to retake Moria! It was valiant but foolish. The time is not come yet. Now, I fear, we must say farewell to Balin son of Fundin. Here he must lie in the halls of his fathers. We will take this book, the Book of Mazarbul, and look at it more closely later. You had better keep it, Gimli, and take it back to Dáin, if you get a chance. It will interest him, though it will grieve him deeply. Come, let us go! The morning is passing.'

'Which way shall we go?' asked Boromir.

'Back to the hall', answered Gandalf. 'But our visit to this room has not been in vain. I now know where we are. This must be, as Gimli says, the Chamber of Mazarbul; and the hall must be the twentyfirst of the North-end. Therefore we should leave by the eastern arch of the hall, and bear right and south, and go downwards. The Twentyfirst Hall should be on the Seventh Level, that is six above the level of the Gates. Come now!

Back to the hall!'

Gandalf had hardly spoken these words, when there came a great noise: a rolling *Boom* that seemed to come from depths far below, and to tremble in the stone at their feet. They sprang towards the door in alarm. *Doom, doom* it rolled again, as if huge hands were turning the very caverns of Moria into a vast drum. Then there came an echoing blast: a great horn was blown in the hall, and answering horns and harsh cries were heard further off. There was a hurrying sound of many feet.

‘They are coming!’ cried Legolas.

‘We cannot get out’, said Gimli.

‘Trapped!’ cried Gandalf. ‘Why did I delay? Here we are, caught, just as they were before. But I was not here then. We will see what ——’

Doom, doom came the drumbeat and the walls shook.

‘Slam the doors and wedge them!’ shouted Aragorn. ‘And keep your packs on as long as you can: we may get a chance to cut our way out yet.’

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‘No!’ said Gandalf. ‘We must not get shut in. Keep the east door ajar!

We will go that way, if we get a chance.’

Another harsh horn-call and shrill cries rang out. Feet were coming down the corridor. There was a ring and clatter as the Company drew their swords. Glamdring shone with a pale light, and Sting glinted at the edges. Boromir set his shoulder against the western door.

‘Wait a moment! Do not close it yet!’ said Gandalf. He sprang forward to Boromir’s side and drew himself up to his full height.

‘Who comes hither to disturb the rest of Balin Lord of Moria?’ he cried in a loud voice.

There was a rush of hoarse laughter, like the fall of sliding stones into a pit; amid the clamour a deep voice was raised in command. *Doom, boom, doom* went the drums in the deep.

With a quick movement Gandalf stepped before the narrow opening of the door and thrust forward his staff: There was a dazzling flash that lit the chamber and the passage outside. For an instant the wizard looked out. Arrows whined and whistled down the corridor as he sprang back.

‘There are Orcs, very many of them’, he said. ‘And some are large and evil: black Uruks of Mordor. For the moment they are hanging back, but there is something else there. A great cave-troll, I think, or more than one. There is no hope of escape that way.’

‘And no hope at all, if they come at the other door as well’, said Boromir.

‘There is no sound outside here yet’, said Aragorn, who was standing by the eastern door listening. ‘The passage on this side plunges straight down a stair: it plainly does not lead back towards the hall. But it is no good flying blindly this way with the pursuit just behind. We cannot block the door. Its key is gone and the lock is broken, and it opens inwards. We must do something to delay the enemy first. We will make them fear the Chamber of Mazarbul!’ he said grimly feeling the edge of his sword, Andúril.

Heavy feet were heard in the corridor. Boromir flung himself against the door and heaved it to; then he wedged it with broken sword-blades and splinters of wood. The Company retreated to the other side of the chamber. But they had no chance to fly yet. There was a blow on the door that made it quiver; and then it began to grind slowly open, driving back the wedges. A huge arm and shoulder, with a dark skin of greenish scales, was thrust through the widening gap. Then a great, flat, toeless foot was forced through below. There was a dead silence outside.

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Boromir leaped forward and hewed at the arm with all his might; but his sword

Boromir leaped forward and hewed at the arm with all his might, but his sword rang, glanced aside, and fell from his shaken hand. The blade was notched.

Suddenly, and to his own surprise, Frodo felt a hot wrath blaze up in his heart. 'The Shire!' he cried, and springing beside Boromir, he stooped, and stabbed with Sting at the hideous foot. There was a bellow, and the foot jerked back, nearly wrenching Sting from Frodo's arm. Black drops dripped from the blade and smoked on the floor. Boromir hurled himself against the door and slammed it again.

'One for the Shire!' cried Aragorn. 'The hobbit's bite is deep! You have a good blade, Frodo son of Drogo!'

There was a crash on the door, followed by crash after crash. Rams and hammers were beating against it. It cracked and staggered back, and the opening grew suddenly wide. Arrows came whistling in, but struck the northern wall, and fell harmlessly to the floor. There was a horn-blast and a rush of feet, and orcs one after another leaped into the chamber. How many there were the Company could not count. The affray was sharp, but the orcs were dismayed by the fierceness of the defence. Legolas shot two through the throat. Gimli hewed the legs from under another that had sprung up on Balin's tomb. Boromir and Aragorn slew many. When thirteen had fallen the rest fled shrieking, leaving the defenders unharmed, except for Sam who had a scratch along the scalp. A quick duck had saved him; and he had felled his orc: a sturdy thrust with his Barrow-blade. A fire was smouldering in his brown eyes that would have made Ted Sandyman step backwards, if he had seen it.

'Now is the time!' cried Gandalf. 'Let us go, before the troll returns!'

But even as they retreated, and before Pippin and Merry had reached the stair outside, a huge orc-chieftain, almost man-high, clad in black mail from head to foot, leaped into the chamber; behind him his followers clustered in the doorway. His broad flat face was swart, his eyes were like coals, and his tongue was red; he wielded a great spear. With a thrust of his huge hide shield he turned Boromir's sword and bore him backwards, throwing him to the ground. Diving under Aragorn's blow with the speed of a striking snake he charged into the Company and thrust with his spear straight at Frodo. The blow caught him on the right side, and Frodo was hurled against the wall and pinned. Sam, with a cry, hacked at the spear-shaft, and it broke. But even as the orc flung down the truncheon and swept out his scimitar, Andúril came down upon his helm. There

was a flash like flame and the helm burst asunder. The orc fell with cloven head. His followers fled howling, as Boromir and Aragorn sprang at them.

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Doom, doom went the drums in the deep. The great voice rolled out again.

‘Now!’ shouted Gandalf. ‘Now is the last chance. Run for it!’

Aragorn picked up Frodo where he lay by the wall and made for the stair, pushing Merry and Pippin in front of him. The others followed; but Gimli had to be dragged away by Legolas: in spite of the peril he lingered by Balin’s tomb with his head bowed. Boromir hauled the eastern door to, grinding upon its hinges: it had great iron rings on either side, but could not be fastened.

‘I am all right’, gasped Frodo. ‘I can walk. Put me down!’

Aragorn nearly dropped him in his amazement. ‘I thought you were dead!’ he cried.

‘Not yet!’ said Gandalf. ‘But there is time for wonder. Off you go, all of you, down the stairs! Wait a few minutes for me at the bottom, but if I do not come soon, go on! Go quickly and choose paths leading right and downwards.’

‘We cannot leave you to hold the door alone!’ said Aragorn.

‘Do as I say!’ said Gandalf fiercely. ‘Swords are no more use here. Go!’

The passage was lit by no shaft and was utterly dark. They groped their way down a long flight of steps, and then looked back; but they could see nothing, except high above them the faint glimmer of the wizard’s staff. He seemed to be still standing on guard by the closed door. Frodo breathed heavily and leaned against Sam, who put his arms about him. They stood peering up the stairs into the darkness. Frodo thought he could hear the voice of Gandalf above, muttering words that ran down the sloping roof with a sighing echo. He could not catch what was said. The walls seemed to be trembling. Every now and again the

drumbeats throbbed and rolled: *doom, doom*. Suddenly at the top of the stair there was a stab of white light. Then there was a dull rumble and a heavy thud. The drumbeats broke out wildly: *doom-boom, doom-boom*, and then stopped. Gandalf came flying down the steps and fell to the ground in the midst of the Company.

‘Well, well! That’s over!’ said the wizard struggling to his feet. ‘I have done all that I could. But I have met my match, and have nearly been destroyed. But don’t stand here! Go on! You will have to do without light for a while: I am rather shaken. Go on! Go on! Where are you, Gimli?’

Come ahead with me! Keep close behind, all of you!’

They stumbled after him wondering what had happened. *doom, doom* went the drumbeats again: they now sounded muffled and far away, but they were following. There was no other sound of pursuit, neither tramp of feet, nor any voice. Gandalf took no turns, right or left, for the passage 330

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seemed to be going in the direction that he desired. Every now and again it descended a flight of steps, fifty or more, to a lower level. At the moment that was their chief danger; for in the dark they could not see a descent, until they came on it, and put their feet out into emptiness. Gandalf felt the ground with his staff like a blind man.

At the end of an hour they had gone a mile, or maybe a little more, and had descended many flights of stairs. There was still no sound of pursuit. Almost they began to hope that they would escape. At the bottom of the seventh flight Gandalf halted.

‘It is getting hot!’ he gasped. ‘We ought to be down at least to the level of the Gates now. Soon I think we should look for a left-hand turn to take us east. I hope it is not far. I am very weary. I must rest here a moment, even if all the orcs ever spawned are after us.’

Gimli took his arm and helped him down to a seat on the step. ‘What happened away up there at the door?’ he asked. ‘Did you meet the beater of the drums?’

‘I do not know’, answered Gandalf. ‘But I found myself suddenly faced by something that I have not met before. I could think of nothing to do but to try and put a shutting-spell on the door. I know many; but to do things of that kind rightly requires time, and even then the door can be broken by strength.

‘As I stood there I could hear orc-voices on the other side: at any moment I thought they would burst it open. I could not hear what was said; they seemed to be talking in their own hideous language. All I caught was *ghâsh*; that is ‘fire’. Then something came into the chamber I felt it through the door, and the orcs themselves were afraid and fell silent. It laid hold of the iron ring, and then it perceived me and my spell.

‘What it was I cannot guess, but I have never felt such a challenge. The counter-spell was terrible. It nearly broke me. For an instant the door left my control and began to open! I had to speak a word of Command. That proved too great a strain. The door burst in pieces. Something dark as a cloud was blocking out all the light inside, and I was thrown backwards down the stairs. All the wall gave way, and the roof of the chamber as well, I think.

‘I am afraid Balin is buried deep, and maybe something else is buried there too. I cannot say. But at least the passage behind us was completely blocked. Ah! I have never felt so spent, but it is passing. And now what about you, Frodo? There was not time to say so, but I have never been 331

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more delighted in my life than when you spoke. I feared that it was a brave but dead hobbit that Aragorn was carrying.’

‘What about me?’ said Frodo. ‘I am alive, and whole I think. I am bruised and in pain, but it is not too bad.’

‘Well’, said Aragorn, ‘I can only say that hobbits are made of a stuff so tough that I have never met the like of it. Had I known, I would have spoken softer in the Inn at Bree! That spear-thrust would have skewered a wild boar!’

‘Well, it did not skewer me, I am glad to say’, said Frodo; ‘though I feel as if I had been caught between a hammer and an anvil.’ He said no more. He found

breathing painful.

‘You take after Bilbo’, said Gandalf. ‘There is more about you than meets the eye, as I said of him long ago.’ Frodo wondered if the remark meant more than it said.

They now went on again. Before long Gimli spoke. He had keen eyes in the dark. ‘I think’, he said, ‘that there is a light ahead. But it is not daylight. It is red. What can it be?’

‘*Ghâsh!*’ muttered Gandalf. ‘I wonder if that is what they meant: that the lower levels are on fire? Still, we can only go on.’

Soon the light became unmistakable, and could be seen by all. It was flickering and glowing on the walls away down the passage before them. They could now see their way: in front the road sloped down swiftly, and some way ahead there stood a low archway; through it the glowing light came. The air became very hot.

When they came to the arch Gandalf went through, signing to them to wait. As he stood just beyond the opening they saw his face lit by a red glow. Quickly he stepped back.

‘There is some new devilry here’, he said, ‘devised for our welcome no doubt. But I know now where we are: we have reached the First Deep, the level immediately below the Gates. This is the Second Hall of Old Moria; and the Gates are near: away beyond the eastern end, on the left, not more than a quarter of a mile. Across the Bridge, up a broad stair, along a wide road through the First Hall, and out! But come and look!’

They peered out. Before them was another cavernous hall. It was loftier and far longer than the one in which they had slept. They were near its eastern end; westward it ran away into darkness. Down the centre stalked a double line of towering pillars. They were carved like boles of mighty trees whose boughs upheld the roof with a branching tracery of stone. Their stems were smooth and black, but a red glow was darkly mirrored in their sides. Right across the floor, close to the feet of two huge pillars a

great fissure had opened. Out of it a fierce red light came, and now and again flames licked at the brink and curled about the bases of the columns. Wisps of dark smoke wavered in the hot air.

‘If we had come by the main road down from the upper halls, we should have been trapped here’, said Gandalf. ‘Let us hope that the fire now lies between us and pursuit. Come! There is no time to lose.’

Even as he spoke they heard again the pursuing drumbeat: *doom, doom, doom*. Away beyond the shadows at the western end of the hall there came cries and horn-calls. *doom, doom*: the pillars seemed to tremble and the flames to quiver.

‘Now for the last race!’ said Gandalf. ‘If the sun is shining outside we may still escape. After me!’

He turned left and sped across the smooth floor of the hall. The distance was greater than it had looked. As they ran they heard the beat and echo of many hurrying feet behind. A shrill yell went up: they had been seen. There was a ring and clash of steel. An arrow whistled over Frodo’s head.

Boromir laughed. ‘They did not expect this’, he said. ‘The fire has cut them off. We are on the wrong side!’

‘Look ahead!’ called Gandalf. ‘The Bridge is near. It is dangerous and narrow.’

Suddenly Frodo saw before him a black chasm. At the end of the hall the floor vanished and fell to an unknown depth. The outer door could only be reached by a slender bridge of stone, without kerb or rail, that spanned the chasm with one curving spring of fifty feet. It was an ancient defence of the Dwarves against any enemy that might capture the First Hall and the outer passages. They could only pass across it in single file. At the brink Gandalf halted and the others came up in a pack behind.

‘Lead the way, Gimli!’ he said. ‘Pippin and Merry next. Straight on and up the stair beyond the door!’

Arrows fell among them. One struck Frodo and sprang back. Another pierced Gandalf’s hat and stuck there like a black feather. Frodo looked behind. Beyond the fire he saw swarming black figures: there seemed to be hundreds of orcs.

They brandished spears and scimitars which shone red as blood in the firelight. *doom, doom* rolled the drumbeats, growing louder and louder, *doom, doom*.

Legolas turned and set an arrow to the string, though it was a long shot for his small bow. He drew, but his hand fell, and the arrow slipped to the ground. He gave a cry of dismay and fear. Two great trolls appeared; they bore great slabs of stone, and flung them down to serve as gangways 333

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over the fire. But it was not the trolls that had filled the Elf with terror. The ranks of the orcs had opened, and they crowded away, as if they themselves were afraid. Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it.

It came to the edge of the fire and the light faded as if a cloud had bent over it. Then with a rush it leaped across the fissure. The flames roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many thongs.

‘Ai! ai!’ wailed Legolas. ‘A Balrog! A Balrog is come!’

Gimli stared with wide eyes. ‘Durin’s Bane!’ he cried, and letting his axe fall he covered his face.

‘A Balrog’, muttered Gandalf. ‘Now I understand.’ He faltered and leaned heavily on his staff. ‘What an evil fortune! And I am already weary.’

The dark figure streaming with fire raced towards them. The orcs yelled and poured over the stone gangways. Then Boromir raised his horn and blew. Loud the challenge rang and bellowed, like the shout of many throats under the cavernous roof. For a moment the orcs quailed and the fiery shadow halted. Then the echoes died as suddenly as a flame blown out by a dark wind, and the enemy advanced again.

‘Over the bridge!’ cried Gandalf, recalling his strength. ‘Fly! This is a foe beyond any of you. I must hold the narrow pass. Fly!’ Aragorn and Boromir did

beyond any of you. I must hold the narrow way. Fly! Aragorn and Boromir did not heed the command, but still held their ground, side by side, behind Gandalf at the far end of the bridge. The others halted just within the doorway at the hall's end, and turned, unable to leave their leader to face the enemy alone.

The Balrog reached the bridge. Gandalf stood in the middle of the span, leaning on the staff in his left hand, but in his other hand Glamdring gleamed, cold and white. His enemy halted again, facing him, and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm.

'You cannot pass', he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell.

'I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.'

The Balrog made no answer. The fire in it seemed to die, but the darkness grew. It stepped forward slowly on to the bridge, and suddenly it drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall; but still

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Gandalf could be seen, glimmering in the gloom; he seemed small, and altogether alone: grey and bent, like a wizened tree before the onset of a storm. From out of the shadow a red sword leaped flaming.

Glamdring glittered white in answer.

There was a ringing clash and a stab of white fire. The Balrog fell back and its sword flew up in molten fragments. The wizard swayed on the bridge, stepped back a pace, and then again stood still.

'You cannot pass!' he said.

With a bound the Balrog leaped full upon the bridge. Its whip whirled and hissed.

'He cannot stand alone!' cried Aragorn suddenly and ran back along the bridge.

‘*Elendil!*’ he shouted. ‘I am with you, Gandalf!’

‘Gondor!’ cried Boromir and leaped after him.

At that moment Gandalf lifted his staff, and crying aloud he smote the bridge before him. The staff broke asunder and fell from his hand. A blinding sheet of white flame sprang up. The bridge cracked. Right at the Balrog’s feet it broke, and the stone upon which it stood crashed into the gulf, while the rest remained, poised, quivering like a tongue of rock thrust out into emptiness.

With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadow plunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard’s knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. ‘Fly, you fools!’ he cried, and was gone.

The fires went out, and blank darkness fell. The Company stood rooted with horror staring into the pit. Even as Aragorn and Boromir came flying back, the rest of the bridge cracked and fell. With a cry Aragorn roused them.

‘Come! I will lead you now!’ he called. ‘We must obey his last command. Follow me!’

They stumbled wildly up the great stairs beyond the door. Aragorn leading, Boromir at the rear. At the top was a wide echoing passage. Along this they fled. Frodo heard Sam at his side weeping, and then he found that he himself was weeping as he ran. *doom, doom, doom* the drumbeats rolled behind, mournful now and slow; *doom!*

They ran on. The light grew before them; great shafts pierced the roof. They ran swifter. They passed into a hall, bright with daylight from its high windows in the east. They fled across it. Through its huge broken doors they passed, and suddenly before them the Great Gates opened, an arch of blazing light.

There was a guard of orcs crouching in the shadows behind the great door posts towering on either side, but the gates were shattered and cast down. Aragorn smote to the ground the captain that stood in his path, and the rest fled in terror of his wrath. The Company swept past them and took no heed of them. Out of the Gates they ran and sprang down the huge and age-worn steps, the threshold of Moria.

Thus, at last, they came beyond hope under the sky and felt the wind on their faces.

They did not halt until they were out of bowshot from the walls. Dimrill Dale lay about them. The shadow of the Misty Mountains lay upon it, but eastwards there was a golden light on the land. It was but one hour after noon. The sun was shining; the clouds were white and high. They looked back. Dark yawned the archway of the Gates under the mountain-shadow. Faint and far beneath the earth rolled the slow drumbeats: *doom*. A thin black smoke trailed out. Nothing else was to be seen; the dale all around was empty. *Doom*. Grief at last wholly overcame them, and they wept long: some standing and silent, some cast upon the ground. *doom, doom*. The drumbeats faded.

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6

Lothlórien

‘Alas! I Fear we cannot stay here longer’, said Aragorn. He looked towards the mountains and held up his sword. ‘Farewell, Gandalf!’

he cried. ‘Did I not say to you: if you pass the doors of Moria, beware? Alas that I spoke true! What hope have we without you?’

He turned to the Company. ‘We must do without hope’, he said. ‘At least we may yet be avenged. Let us gird ourselves and weep no more!’

Come! We have a long road, and much to do.’

They rose and looked about them. Northward the dale ran up into a glen of shadows between two great arms of the mountains, above which three white peaks were shining: Celebdil, Fanuidhol, Caradhras. the Mountains of Moria. At the head of the glen a torrent flowed like a white lace over an endless ladder of short falls, and a mist of foam hung in the air about the mountains' feet.

'Yonder is the Dimrill Stair', said Aragorn, pointing to the falls. 'Down the deep-cloven way that climbs beside the torrent we should have come, if fortune had been kinder.'

'Or Caradhras less cruel', said Gimli. 'There he stands smiling in the sun!'

He shook his fist at the furthest of the snow-capped peaks and turned away. To the east the outflung arm of the mountains marched to a sudden end, and far lands could be descried beyond them, wide and vague. To the south the Misty Mountains receded endlessly as far as sight could reach. Less than a mile away, and a little below them, for they still stood high up on the west side of the dale, there lay a mere. It was long and oval, shaped like a great spear-head thrust deep into the northern glen; but its southern

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end was beyond the shadows under the sunlit sky. Yet its waters were dark: a deep blue like clear evening sky seen from a lamp-lit room. Its face was still and unruffled. About it lay a smooth sward, shelving down on all sides to its bare unbroken rim.

'There lies the Mirrormere, deep Kheled-zâram!' said Gimli sadly. 'I remember that he said: 'May you have joy of the sight! But we cannot linger there.' Now long shall I journey ere I have joy again. It is I that must hasten away, and he that must remain.'

The Company now went down the road from the Gates. It was rough and broken, fading to a winding track between heather and whin that thrust amid the cracking stones. But still it could be seen that once long ago a great paved way had wound upwards from the lowlands of the Dwarf-kingdom. In places there were ruined works of stone beside the path, and mounds of green topped with slender birches, or fir-trees sighing in the wind. An eastward bend led them hard by the

sword of Mirrormere, and there not far from the roadside stood a single column broken at the top.

‘That is Durin’s Stone!’ cried Gimli. ‘I cannot pass without turning aside for a moment to look at the wonder of the dale!’

‘Be swift then!’ said Aragorn, looking back towards the Gates. ‘The Sun sinks early. The Orcs will not, maybe, come out till after dusk, but we must be far away before nightfall. The Moon is almost spent, and it will be dark tonight.’

‘Come with me, Frodo!’ cried the dwarf, springing from the road. ‘I would not have you go without seeing Kheled-zâram.’ He ran down the long green slope. Frodo followed slowly, drawn by the still blue water in spite of hurt and weariness; Sam came up behind.

Beside the standing stone Gimli halted and looked up. It was cracked and weather-worn, and the faint runes upon its side could not be read.

‘This pillar marks the spot where Durin first looked in the Mirrormere’, said the dwarf. ‘Let us look ourselves once, ere we go!’

They stooped over the dark water. At first they could see nothing. Then slowly they saw the forms of the encircling mountains mirrored in a profound blue, and the peaks were like plumes of white flame above them; beyond there was a space of sky. There like jewels sunk in the deep shone glinting stars, though sunlight was in the sky above. Of their own stooping forms no shadow could be seen.

‘O Kheled-zâram fair and wonderful!’ said Gimli. ‘There lies the Crown of Durin till he wakes. Farewell!’ He bowed, and turned away, and hastened back up the green-sward to the road again.

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‘What did you see?’ said Pippin to Sam, but Sam was too deep in thought to answer.

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The road now turned south and went quickly downwards, running out from between the arms of the dale. Some way below the mere they came on a deep well of water, clear as crystal, from which a freshet fell over a stone lip and ran glistening and gurgling down a steep rocky channel.

‘Here is the spring from which the Silverlode rises,’ said Gimli. ‘Do not drink of it! It is icy cold.’

‘Soon it becomes a swift river, and it gathers water from many other mountain-streams’, said Aragorn. ‘Our road leads beside it for many miles. For I shall take you by the road that Gandalf chose, and first I hope to come to the woods where the Silverlode flows into the Great River-out yonder.’ They looked as he pointed, and before them they could see the stream leaping down to the trough of the valley, and then running on and away into the lower lands, until it was lost in a golden haze.

‘There lie the woods of Lothlórien!’ said Legolas. ‘That is the fairest of all the dwellings of my people. There are no trees like the trees of that land. For in the autumn their leaves fall not, but turn to gold. Not till the spring comes and the new green opens do they fall, and then the boughs are laden with yellow flowers; and the floor of the wood is golden, and golden is the roof, and its pillars are of silver, for the bark of the trees is smooth and grey. So still our songs in Mirkwood say. My heart would be glad if I were beneath the eaves of that wood, and it were springtime!’

‘My heart will be glad, even in the winter’, said Aragorn. ‘But it lies many miles away. Let us hasten!’

For some time Frodo and Sam managed to keep up with the others; but Aragorn was leading them at a great pace, and after a while they lagged behind. They had eaten nothing since the early morning. Sam’s cut was burning like fire, and his head felt light. In spite of the shining sun the wind seemed chill after the warm darkness of Moria. He shivered. Frodo felt every step more painful and he gasped for breath.

At last Legolas turned, and seeing them now far behind, he spoke to Aragorn. The others halted, and Aragorn ran back, calling to Boromir to come with him.

‘I am sorry, Frodo!’ he cried, full of concern. ‘So much has happened this day and we have such need of haste, that I have forgotten that you were hurt; and

Sam too. You should have spoken. We have done nothing to ease you, as we ought, though all the orcs of Moria were after us. Come now! A little further on there is a place where we can rest for a little. There I will do what I can for you. Come, Boromir! We will carry them.'

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Soon afterwards they came upon another stream that ran down from the west, and joined its bubbling water with the hurrying Silverlode. Together they plunged over a fall of green-hued stone, and foamed down into a dell. About it stood fir-trees, short and bent, and its sides were steep and clothed with harts-tongue and shrubs of whortle-berry. At the bottom there was a level space through which the stream flowed noisily over shining pebbles. Here they rested. It was now nearly three hours after noon, and they had come only a few miles from the Gates. Already the sun was westering. While Gimli and the two younger hobbits kindled a fire of brush-and fir-wood, and drew water, Aragorn tended Sam and Frodo. Sam's wound was not deep, but it looked ugly, and Aragorn's face was grave as he examined it. After a moment he looked up with relief.

'Good luck, Sam!' he said. 'Many have received worse than this in payment for the slaying of their first orc. The cut is not poisoned, as the wounds of orc-blades too often are. It should heal well when I have tended it. Bathe it when Gimli has heated water.'

He opened his pouch and drew out some withered leaves. 'They are dry and some of their virtue has one, he said, but here I have still some of the leaves of *athelas* that I gathered near Weathertop. Crush one in the water, and wash the wound clean, and I will bind it. Now it is your turn. Frodo!'

'I am all right', said Frodo, reluctant to have his garments touched. 'All I needed was some food and a little rest.'

'No!' said Aragorn. 'We must have a look and see what the hammer and the anvil have done to you. I still marvel that you are alive at all.' Gently he stripped off Frodo's old jacket and worn tunic and gave a gasp of wonder. Then he

... Frodo's old jacket and worn tunic, and gave a gasp of wonder. Then he laughed. The silver corslet shimmered before his eyes like the light upon a rippling sea. Carefully he took it off and held it up, and the gems on it glittered like stars, and the sound of the shaken rings was like the tinkle of rain in a pool.

‘Look, my friends!’ he called. ‘Here’s a pretty hobbit-skin to wrap an elven-princeling in! If it were known that hobbits had such hides, all the hunters of Middle-earth would be riding to the Shire.’

‘And all the arrows of all the hunters in the world would be in vain’, said Gimli, gazing at the mail in wonder. ‘It is a mithril-coat. Mithril! I have never seen or heard tell of one so fair. Is this the coat that Gandalf spoke of? Then he undervalued it. But it was well given!’

‘I have often wondered what you and Bilbo were doing, so close in his little room’, said Merry. ‘Bless the old hobbit! I love him more than ever. I hope we get a chance of telling him about it!’

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There was a dark and blackened bruise on Frodo’s right side and breast. Under the mail there was a shirt of soft leather, but at one point the rings had been driven through it into the flesh. Frodo’s left side also was scored and bruised where he had been hurled against the wall. While the others set the food ready. Aragorn bathed the hurts with water in which *athelas* was steeped. The pungent fragrance filled the dell, and all those who stooped over the steaming water felt refreshed and strengthened. Soon Frodo felt the pain leave him, and his breath grew easy: though he was stiff and sore to the touch for many days. Aragorn bound some soft pads of cloth at his side.

‘The mail is marvellously light’, he said. ‘Put it on again, if you can bear it. My heart is glad to know that you have such a coat. Do not lay it aside, even in sleep, unless fortune brings you where you are safe for a while; and that will seldom chance while your quest lasts.’

When they had eaten, the Company got ready to go on. They put out the fire and

hid all traces of it. Then climbing out of the dell they took to the road again. They had not gone far before the sun sank behind the westward heights and great shadows crept down the mountain-sides. Dusk veiled their feet, and mist rose in the hollows. Away in the east the evening light lay pale upon the dim lands of distant plain and wood. Sam and Frodo now feeling eased and greatly refreshed were able to go at a fair pace, and with only one brief halt Aragorn led the Company on for nearly three more hours. It was dark. Deep night had fallen. There were many clear stars, but the fast-waning moon would not be seen till late. Gimli and Frodo were at the rear, walking softly and not speaking, listening for any sound upon the road behind. At length Gimli broke the silence.

‘Not a sound but the wind’, he said. ‘There are no goblins near, or my ears are made of wood. It is to be hoped that the Orcs will be content with driving us from Moria. And maybe that was all their purpose, and they had nothing else to do with us-with the Ring. Though Orcs will often pursue foes for many leagues into the plain, if they have a fallen captain to avenge.’

Frodo did not answer. He looked at Sting, and the blade was dull. Yet he had heard something, or thought he had. As soon as the shadows had fallen about them and the road behind was dim, he had heard again the quick patter of feet. Even now he heard it. He turned swiftly. There were two tiny gleams of light behind, or for a moment he thought he saw them, but at once they slipped aside and vanished.

‘What is it?’ said the dwarf.

‘I don’t know.’ answered Frodo. ‘I thought I heard feet, and I thought I saw a light-like eyes. I have thought so often, since we first entered Moria.’

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Gimli halted and stooped to the ground. ‘I hear nothing but the night-speech of plant and stone’, he said. ‘Come! Let us hurry! The others are out of sight.’

The night-wind blew chill up the valley to meet them. Before them a wide grey shadow loomed, and they heard an endless rustle of leaves like poplars in the

breeze.

‘Lothlórien!’ cried Legolas. ‘Lothlórien! We have come to the eaves of the Golden Wood. Alas that it is winter!’

Under the night the trees stood tall before them, arched over the road and stream that ran suddenly beneath their spreading boughs. In the dim light of the stars their stems were grey, and their quivering leaves a hint of fallow gold.

‘Lothlórien!’ said Aragorn. ‘Glad I am to hear again the wind in the trees! We are still little more than five leagues from the Gates, but we can go no further. Here let us hope that the virtue of the Elves will keep us tonight from the peril that comes behind.’

‘If Elves indeed still dwell here in the darkening world’, said Gimli.

‘It is long since any of my own folk journeyed hither back to the land whence we wandered in ages long ago’, said Legolas, ‘but we hear that Lórien is not yet deserted, for there is a secret power here that holds evil from the land. Nevertheless its folk are seldom seen, and maybe they dwell now deep in the woods and far from the northern border.’

‘Indeed deep in the wood they dwell’, said Aragorn, and sighed as if some memory stirred in him. ‘We must fend for ourselves tonight. We will go forward a short way, until the trees are all about us, and then we will turn aside from the path and seek a place to rest in.’

He stepped forward; but Boromir stood irresolute and did not follow.

‘Is there no other way?’ he said.

‘What other fairer way would you desire?’ said Aragorn.

‘A plain road, though it led through a hedge of swords’, said Boromir.

‘By strange paths has this Company been led, and so far to evil fortune. Against my will we passed under the shades of Moria, to our loss. And now we must enter the Golden Wood, you say. But of that perilous land we have heard in Gondor, and it is said that few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed.’

‘Say not *unscathed*, but if you say *unchanged*, then maybe you will speak the truth said Aragorn. But lore wanes in Gondor, Boromir, if in the city of those who once were wise they now speak evil of Lothlórien. Believe what you will, there is no other way for us - unless you would go back to Moriagate, or scale the pathless mountains, or swim the Great River all alone.’

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‘Then lead on!’ said Boromir. ‘But it is perilous.’

‘Perilous indeed’, said Aragorn, ‘fair and perilous; but only evil need fear it, or those who bring some evil with them. Follow me!’

They had gone little more than a mile into the forest when they came upon another stream flowing down swiftly from the tree-clad slopes that climbed back westward towards the mountains. They heard it splashing over a fall away among the shadows on their right. Its dark hurrying waters ran across the path before them, and joined the Silverlode in a swirl of dim pools among the roots of trees.

‘Here is Nimrodel!’ said Legolas. ‘Of this stream the Silvan Elves made many songs long ago, and still we sing them in the North, remembering the rainbow on its falls, and the golden flowers that floated in its foam. All is dark now and the Bridge of Nimrodel is broken down. I will bathe my feet, for it is said that the water is healing to the weary.’ He went forward and climbed down the deep-cloven bank and stepped into the stream.

‘Follow me!’ he cried. ‘The water is not deep. Let us wade across! On the further bank we can rest. and the sound of the falling water may bring us sleep and forgetfulness of grief.’

One by one they climbed down and followed Legolas. For a moment Frodo stood near the brink and let the water flow over his tired feet. It was cold but its touch was clean, and as he went on and it mounted to his knees, he felt that the stain of travel and all weariness was washed from his limbs. When all the Company had crossed, they sat and rested and ate a little food; and Legolas told

Company had crossed, they sat and rested and ate a little food, and Legolas told them tales of Lothlórien that the Elves of Mirkwood still kept in their hearts, of sunlight and starlight upon the meadows by the Great River before the world was grey. At length a silence fell, and they heard the music of the waterfall running sweetly in the shadows. Almost Frodo fancied that he could hear a voice singing, mingled with the sound of the water.

‘Do you hear the voice of Nimrodel?’ asked Legolas. ‘I will sing you a song of the maiden Nimrodel, who bore the same name as the stream beside which she lived long ago. It is a fair song in our woodland tongue; but this is how it runs in the Westron Speech, as some in Rivendell now sing it.’ In a soft voice hardly to be heard amid the rustle of the leaves above them he began:

An Elven-maid there was of old,

A shining star by day:

Her mantle white was hemmed with gold,

Her shoes of silvergrey.

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A star was bound upon her brows,

A light was on her hair

As sun upon the golden boughs

In Lórien the fair.

Her hair was long, her limbs were white,

And fair she was and free;

And in the wind she went as light

As leaf of linden-tree.

Beside the falls of Nimrodel,

By water clear and cool,

Her voice as falling silver fell

Into the shining pool.

Where now she wanders none can tell,

In sunlight or in shade;

For lost of yore was Nimrodel

And in the mountains strayed.

The elven-ship in haven grey

Beneath the mountain-lee

Awaited her for many a day

Beside the roaring sea.

A wind by night in Northern lands

Arose, and loud it cried,

And drove the ship from elven-strands

Across the streaming tide.

When dawn came dim the land was lost,

The mountains sinking grey

Beyond the heaving waves that tossed

Their plumes of blinding spray.

*Amroth beheld the fading shore
Now low beyond the swell,
And cursed the faithless ship that bore
Him far from Nimrodel.*

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*Of old he was an Elven-king,
A lord of tree and glen,
When golden were the boughs in spring
In fair Lothlórien.
From helm to sea they saw him leap,
As arrow from the string,
And dive into the water deep,
As mew upon the wing.
The wind was in his flowing hair,
The foam about him shone;
Afar they saw him strong and fair
Go riding like a swan.
But from the West has come no word,*

And on the Hither Shore

No tidings Elven-folk have heard

Of Amroth evermore.

The voice of Legolas faltered, and the song ceased. 'I cannot sing any more', he said. 'That is but a part, for I have forgotten much. It is long and sad, for it tells how sorrow came upon Lothlórien, Lórien of the Blossom, when the Dwarves awakened evil in the mountains.'

'But the Dwarves did not make the evil', said Gimli.

'I said not so; yet evil came', answered Legolas sadly. 'Then many of the Elves of Nimrodel's kindred left their dwellings and departed and she was lost far in the South, in the passes of the White Mountains; and she came not to the ship where Amroth her lover waited for her. But in the spring when the wind is in the new leaves the echo of her voice may still be heard by the falls that bear her name. And when the wind is in the South the voice of Amroth comes up from the sea; for Nimrodel flows into Silverlode, that Elves call Celebrant, and Celebrant into Anduin the Great. and Anduin flows into the Bay of Belfalas whence the Elves of Lórien set sail. But neither Nimrodel nor Amroth ever came back.

'It is told that she had a house built in the branches of a tree that grew near the falls; for that was the custom of the Elves of Lórien, to dwell in the trees, and maybe it is so still. Therefore they were called the Galadhrim, the Tree-people. Deep in their forest the trees are very great. The people 345

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of the woods did not delve in the ground like Dwarves, nor build strong places of stone before the Shadow came.'

'And even in these latter days dwelling in the trees might be thought safer than sitting on the ground', said Gimli. He looked across the stream to the road that led back to Dimrill Dale, and then up into the roof of dark boughs above.

'Your words bring good counsel, Gimli', said Aragorn. 'We cannot build a

YOUR WORDS BRING GOOD COUNSEL, GIMLI, SAID ARAGORN. WE CANNOT BUILD A house, but tonight we will do as the Galadhrim and seek refuge in the treetops, if we can. We have sat here beside the road already longer than was wise.'

The Company now turned aside from the path, and went into the shadow of the deeper woods, westward along the mountain-stream away from Silverlode. Not far from the falls of Nimrodel they found a cluster of trees, some of which overhung the stream. Their great grey trunks were of mighty girth, but their height could not be guessed.

'I will climb up', said Legolas. 'I am at home among trees, by root or bough, though these trees are of a kind strange to me, save as a name in song. *Mellyrn* they are called, and are those that bear the yellow blossom, but I have never climbed in one. I will see now what is their shape and way of growth.'

'Whatever it may be', said Pippin, 'they will be marvellous trees indeed if they can offer any rest at night, except to birds. I cannot sleep on a perch!

'Then dig a hole in the ground', said Legolas, 'if that is more after the fashion of your kind. But you must dig swift and deep, if you wish to hide from Orcs.' He sprang lightly up from the ground and caught a branch that grew from the trunk high above his head. But even as he swung there for a moment, a voice spoke suddenly from the tree-shadows above him.

'*Daro!*' it said in commanding tone, and Legolas dropped back to earth in surprise and fear. He shrank against the bole of the tree.

'Stand still!' he whispered to the others. 'Do not move or speak!'

There was a sound of soft laughter over their heads, and then another clear voice spoke in an elven-tongue. Frodo could understand little of what was said, for the speech that the Silvan folk east of the mountains used among themselves was unlike that of the West. Legolas looked up and answered in the same language.*

'Who are they, and what do they say?' asked Merry.

'They're Elves', said Sam. 'Can't you hear their voices?'

'Yes, they are Elves', said Legolas; 'and they say that you breathe so loud that they could shoot you in the dark.' Sam hastily put his hand over his mouth. 'But they say also that you need have no fear. They have been 346

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aware of us for a long while. They heard my voice across the Nimrodel, and knew that I was one of their Northern kindred, and therefore they did not hinder our crossing; and afterwards they heard my song. Now they bid me climb up with Frodo; for they seem to have had some tidings of him and of our journey. The others they ask to wait a little and to keep watch at the foot of the tree, until they have decided what is to be done.'

Out of the shadows a ladder was let down: it was made of rope, silvergrey and glimmering in the dark, and though it looked slender it proved strong enough to bear many men. Legolas ran lightly up, and Frodo followed slowly; behind came Sam trying not to breathe loudly. The branches of the mallorn-tree grew out nearly straight from the trunk, and then swept upward; but near the top the main stem divided into a crown of many boughs, and among these they found that there had been built a wooden platform, or *flet* as such things were called in those days: the Elves called it a *talan*. It was reached by a round hole in the centre through which the ladder passed. When Frodo came at last up on to the flet he found Legolas seated with three other Elves. They were clad in shadowy-grey, and could not be seen among the tree-stems, unless they moved suddenly. They stood up, and one of them uncovered a small lamp that gave out a slender silver beam. He held it up, looking at Frodo's face, and Sam's. Then he shut off the light again, and spoke words of welcome in his elven-tongue. Frodo spoke haltingly in return.

'Welcome!' the Elf then said again in the Common Language, speaking slowly. 'We seldom use any tongue but our own; for we dwell now in the heart of the forest, and do not willingly have dealings with any other folk. Even our own kindred in the North are sundered from us. But there are some of us still who go abroad for the gathering of news and the watching of our enemies, and they speak the languages of other lands. I am one. Haldir is my name. My brothers, Rúmil and Orophin, speak little of your tongue.'

'But we have heard rumours of your coming, for the messengers of Elrond passed by Lórien on their way home up the Dimrill Stair. We had not heard of hobbits, or halflings, for many a long year, and did not know that any yet dwelt in Middle-earth. You do not look evil! And since you come with an Elf of our

kindred, we are willing to befriend you, as Elrond asked; though it is not our custom to lead strangers through our land. But you must stay here tonight. How many are you?’

‘Eight’, said Legolas. ‘Myself, four hobbits; and two men, one of whom, Aragorn, is an Elf-friend of the folk of Westeros.’

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‘The name of Aragorn son of Arathorn is known in Lórien’, said Haldir, ‘and he has the favour of the Lady. All then is well. But you have yet spoken only of seven.’

‘The eighth is a dwarf’, said Legolas.

‘A dwarf!’ said Haldir. ‘That is not well. We have not had dealings with the Dwarves since the Dark Days. They are not permitted in our land. I cannot allow him to pass.’

‘But he is from the Lonely Mountain, one of Dáin’s trusty people, and friendly to Elrond’, said Frodo. ‘Elrond himself chose him to be one of our companions, and he has been brave and faithful.’

The Elves spoke together in soft voices, and questioned Legolas in their own tongue. ‘Very good’, said Haldir at last. ‘We will do this, though it is against our liking. If Aragorn and Legolas will guard him, and answer for him, he shall pass; but he must go blindfold through Lothlórien.’

‘But now we must debate no longer. Your folk must not remain on the ground. We have been keeping watch on the rivers, ever since we saw a great troop of Orcs going north toward Moria, along the skirts of the mountains, many days ago. Wolves are howling on the wood’s borders. If you have indeed come from Moria, the peril cannot be far behind. Tomorrow early you must go on.’

‘The four hobbits shall climb up here and stay with us—we do not fear them!’

There is another *talan* in the next tree. There the others must take refuge. You, Legolas, must answer to us for them. Call us, if anything is amiss! And have an eye on that dwarf!’

Legolas at once went down the ladder to take Haldir’s message; and soon afterwards Merry and Pippin clambered up on to the high flet. They were out of breath and seemed rather scared.

‘There!’ said Merry panting. ‘We have lugged up your blankets as well as our own. Strider has hidden all the rest of the baggage in a deep drift of leaves.’

‘You had no need of your burdens’, said Haldir. ‘It is cold in the treetops in winter, though the wind tonight is in the South; but we have food and drink to give you that will drive away the night-chill, and we have skins and cloaks to spare.’

The hobbits accepted this second (and far better) supper very gladly. Then they wrapped themselves warmly, not only in the fur-cloaks of the Elves, but in their own blankets as well, and tried to go to sleep. But weary as they were only Sam found that easy to do. Hobbits do not like heights, and do not sleep upstairs, even when they have any stairs. The flet was not 348

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at all to their liking as a bedroom. It had no walls. not even a rail; only on one side was there a light plaited screen, which could be moved and fixed in different places according to the wind.

Pippin went on talking for a while. ‘I hope, if I do go to sleep in this bed-loft, that I shan’t roll off ’, he said.

‘Once I do get to sleep’, said Sam, ‘i shall go on sleeping, whether I roll off or no. And the less said, the sooner I’ll drop off, if you take my meaning.’

Frodo lay for some time awake, and looked up at the stars glinting through the pale roof of quivering leaves. Sam was snoring at his side long before he himself closed his eyes. He could dimly see the grey forms of two elves sitting motionless with their arms about their knees, speaking in whispers. The other had gone down to take up his watch on one of the lower branches. At last he

had gone down to take up his watch on one of the lower branches. At last lulled by the wind in the boughs above, and the sweet murmur of the falls of Nimrodel below, Frodo fell asleep with the song of Legolas running in his mind.

Late in the night he awoke. The other hobbits were asleep. The Elves were gone. The sickle Moon was gleaming dimly among the leaves. The wind was still. A little way off he heard a harsh laugh and the tread of many feet on the ground below. There was a ring of metal. The sounds died slowly away, and seemed to go southward, on into the wood. A head appeared suddenly through the hole in the flet. Frodo sat up in alarm and saw that it was a grey-hooded Elf. He looked towards the hobbits.

‘What is it?’ said Frodo.

‘*Yrch!*’ said the Elf in a hissing whisper, and cast on to the flet the rope-ladder rolled up.

‘Orcs!’ said Frodo. ‘What are they doing?’ But the Elf had gone. There were no more sounds. Even the leaves were silent, and the very falls seemed to be hushed. Frodo sat and shivered in his wraps. He was thankful that they had not been caught on the ground; but he felt that the trees offered little protection, except concealment. Orcs were as keen as hounds on a scent, it was said, but they could also climb. He drew out Sting: it flashed and glittered like a blue flame and then slowly faded again and grew dull. In spite of the fading of his sword the feeling of immediate danger did not leave Frodo, rather it grew stronger. He got up and crawled to the opening and peered down. He was almost certain that he could hear stealthy movements at the tree’s foot far below.

Not Elves; for the woodland folk were altogether noiseless in their movements. Then he heard faintly a sound like sniffing: and something

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seemed to be scrabbling on the bark of the tree-trunk. He stared down into the dark, holding his breath.

Something was now climbing slowly, and its breath came like a soft hissing through closed teeth. Then coming up, close to the stem, Frodo saw two pale eyes. They stopped and gazed upward unwinking. Suddenly they turned away.

...they stopped and gazed up into the darkness. Suddenly they turned away, and a shadowy figure slipped round the trunk of the tree and vanished. Immediately afterwards Haldir came climbing swiftly up through the branches. 'There was something in this tree that I have never seen before', he said. 'It was not an orc. It fled as soon as I touched the tree-stem. It seemed to be wary, and to have some skill in trees, or I might have thought that it was one of you hobbits.'

'I did not shoot, for I dared not arouse any cries: we cannot risk battle. A strong company of Orcs has passed. They crossed the Nimrodelcourse their foul feet in its clean water!-and went on down the old road beside the river. They seemed to pick up some scent, and they searched the ground for a while near the place where you halted. The three of us could not challenge a hundred, so we went ahead and spoke with feigned voices, leading them on into the wood.'

'Orophin has now gone in haste back to our dwellings to warn our people. None of the Orcs will ever return out of Lórien. And there will be many Elves hidden on the northern border before another night falls. But you must take the road south as soon as it is fully light.'

Day came pale from the East. As the light grew it filtered through the yellow leaves of the mallorn, and it seemed to the hobbits that the early sun of a cool summer's morning was shining. Pale-blue sky peeped among the moving branches. Looking through an opening on the south side of the flet Frodo saw all the valley of the Silverlode lying like a sea of fallow gold tossing gently in the breeze. The morning was still young and cold when the Company set out again, guided now by Haldir and his brother Rúmil. 'Farewell, sweet Nimrodel!' cried Legolas. Frodo looked back and caught a gleam of white foam among the grey tree-stems. 'Farewell', he said. It seemed to him that he would never hear again a running water so beautiful, for ever blending its innumerable notes in an endless changeful music.

They went back to the path that still went on along the west side of the Silverlode, and for some way they followed it southward. There were the prints of orc-feet in the earth. But soon Haldir turned aside into the trees and halted on the bank of the river under their shadows.

'There is one of my people yonder across the stream', he said 'though you may not see him.' He gave a call like the low whistle of a bird, and out

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of a thicket of young trees an Elf stepped, clad in grey, but with his hood thrown back; his hair glinted like gold in the morning sun. Haldir skilfully cast over the stream a coil of grey rope, and he caught it and bound the end about a tree near the bank.

‘Celebrant is already a strong stream here, as you see’, said Haldir ‘and it runs both swift and deep, and is very cold. We do not set foot in it so far north, unless we must. But in these days of watchfulness we do not make bridges. This is how we cross! Follow me!’ He made his end of the rope fast about another tree, and then ran lightly along it, over the river and back again, as if he were on a road.

‘I can walk this path’, said Legolas; ‘but the others have not this skill. Must they swim?’

‘No!’ said Haldir. ‘We have two more ropes. We will fasten them above the other, one shoulder-high, and another half-high, and holding these the strangers should be able to cross with care.’

When this slender bridge had been made, the Company passed over, some cautiously and slowly, others more easily. Of the hobbits Pippin proved the best for he was sure-footed, and he walked over quickly, holding only with one hand; but he kept his eyes on the bank ahead and did not look down. Sam shuffled along, clutching hard, and looking down into the pale eddying water as if it was a chasm in the mountains. He breathed with relief when he was safely across. ‘Live and learn! as my gaffer used to say. Though he was thinking of gardening, not of roosting like a bird, nor of trying to walk like a spider. Not even my uncle Andy ever did a trick like that!’

When at length all the Company was gathered on the east bank of the Silverlode, the Elves untied the ropes and coiled two of them. Rúmil, who had remained on the other side, drew back the last one, slung it on his shoulder, and with a wave of his hand went away, back to Nimrodel to keep watch.

‘Now, friends’, said Haldir, ‘you have entered the Naith of Lórien or the Gore, as you would say, for it is the land that lies like a spear-head between the arms of Silverlode and Anduin the Great. We allow no strangers to spy out the secrets of the Naith. Few indeed are permitted even to set foot there.

‘As was agreed, I shall here blindfold the eyes of Gimli the Dwarf. The other may walk free for a while, until we come nearer to our dwellings, down in Egladil, in the Angle between the waters.’

This was not at all to the liking of Gimli. ‘The agreement was made without my consent’, he said. ‘I will not walk blindfold, like a beggar or a

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prisoner. And I am no spy. My folk have never had dealings with any of the servants of the Enemy. Neither have we done harm to the Elves. I am no more likely to betray you than Legolas, or any other of my companions.’

‘I do not doubt you’, said Haldir. ‘Yet this is our law. I am not the master of the law, and cannot set it aside. I have done much in letting you set foot over Celebrant.’

Gimli was obstinate. He planted his feet firmly apart, and laid his hand upon the haft of his axe. ‘I will go forward free’, he said, ‘or I will go back and seek my own land, where I am known to be true of word, though I perish alone in the wilderness.’

‘You cannot go back’, said Haldir sternly. ‘Now you have come thus far, you must be brought before the Lord and the Lady. They shall judge you, to hold you or to give you leave, as they will. You cannot cross the rivers again, and behind you there are now secret sentinels that you cannot pass. You would be slain before you saw them.’

Gimli drew his axe from his belt. Haldir and his companion bent their bows. ‘A plague on Dwarves and their stiff necks!’ said Legolas.

‘Come!’ said Aragorn. ‘If I am still to lead this Company, you must do as I bid. It is hard upon the Dwarf to be thus singled out. We will all be blindfold, even Legolas. That will be best, though it will make the journey slow and dull.’

Gimli laughed suddenly. ‘A merry troop of fools we shall look! Will Haldir lead us all on a string, like many blind beggars with one dog? But I will be content, if only Legolas here shares my blindness.’

‘I am an Elf and a kinsman here’, said Legolas, becoming angry in his turn.

‘Now let us cry: ‘a plague on the stiff necks of Elves!’’ said Aragorn.

‘But the Company shall all fare alike. Come, bind our eyes Haldir!’

‘I shall claim full amends for every fall and stubbed toe, if you do not lead us well’, said Gimli as they bound a cloth about his eyes.

‘You will have no claim’, said Haldir. ‘I shall lead you well, and the paths are smooth and straight.’

‘Alas for the folly of these days!’ said Legolas. ‘Here all are enemies of the one Enemy, and yet I must walk blind, while the sun is merry in the woodland under leaves of gold!’

‘Folly it may seem’, said Haldir. ‘Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him. Yet so little faith and trust do we find now in the world beyond Lothlórien, unless maybe in Rivendell, that we dare not by our own

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trust endanger our land. We live now upon an island amid many perils, and our hands are more often upon the bowstring than upon the harp.

‘The rivers long defended us, but they are a sure guard no more for the Shadow has crept northward all about us. Some speak of departing, yet for that it already seems too late. The mountains to the west are growing evil; to the east the lands are waste, and full of Sauron’s creatures; and it is rumoured that we cannot now safely pass southward through Rohan, and the mouths of the Great River are watched by the Enemy. Even if we could come to the shores of the Sea, we should find no longer any shelter there. It is said that there are still havens of the High Elves, but they are far north and west, beyond the land of the Halflings. But where that may be, though the Lord and Lady may know, I do not.’

‘You ought at least to guess, since you have seen us’, said Merry. ‘There are Elf-havens west of my land, the Shire where Hobbits live.’

‘Happy folk are Hobbits to dwell near the shores of the sea!’ said Haldir. ‘It is long indeed since any of my folk have looked on it, yet still we remember it in song. Tell me of these havens as we walk.’

‘I cannot’, said Merry. ‘I have never seen them. I have never been out of my own land before. And if I had known what the world outside was like. I don’t think I should have had the heart to leave it.’

‘Not even to see fair Lothlórien?’ said Haldir. ‘The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater.

‘Some there are among us who sing that the Shadow will draw back and peace shall come again. Yet I do not believe that the world about us will ever again be as it was of old, or the light of the Sun as it was aforetime. For the Elves, I fear, it will prove at best a truce, in which they may pass to the Sea unhindered and leave the Middle-earth for ever. Alas for Lothlórien that I love! It would be a poor life in a land where no mallorn grew. But if there are mallorn-trees beyond the Great Sea, none have reported it.’

As they spoke thus, the Company filed slowly along the paths in the wood, led by Haldir, while the other Elf walked behind. They felt the ground beneath their feet smooth and soft, and after a while they walked more freely, without fear of hurt or fall. Being deprived of sight, Frodo found his hearing and other senses sharpened. He could smell the trees and the trodden grass. He could hear many different notes in the rustle of the leaves overhead, the river murmuring away on his right, and the thin clear

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voices of birds in the sky. He felt the sun upon his face and hands when they passed through an open glade.

As soon as he set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling had come upon him, and it deepened as he walked on into the Naith: it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was - now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world.

Evil had been seen and heard there, sorrow had been known; the Elves feared and distrusted the world outside: wolves were howling on the wood's borders: but on the land of Lórien no shadow lay.

All that day the Company marched on, until they felt the cool evening come and heard the early night-wind whispering among many leaves. Then they rested and slept without fear upon the ground; for their guides would not permit them to unbind their eyes, and they could not climb. In the morning they went on again, walking without haste. At noon they halted, and Frodo was aware that they had passed out under the shining Sun. Suddenly he heard the sound of many voices all around him. A marching host of Elves had come up silently: they were hastening toward the northern borders to guard against any attack from Moria; and they brought news, some of which Haldir reported. The marauding orcs had been waylaid and almost all destroyed; the remnant had fled westward towards the mountains, and were being pursued. A strange creature also had been seen, running with bent back and with hands near the ground, like a beast and yet not of beast-shape. It had eluded capture, and they had not shot it, not knowing whether it was good or ill, and it had vanished down the Silverlode southward.

‘Also’, said Haldir, ‘they bring me a message from the Lord and Lady of the Galadhrim. You are all to walk free, even the dwarf Gimli. It seems that the Lady knows who and what is each member of your Company. New messages have come from Rivendell perhaps.’

He removed the bandage first from Gimli's eyes. ‘Your pardon!’ he said, bowing low. ‘Look on us now with friendly eyes! Look and be glad, for you are the first dwarf to behold the trees of the Naith of Lórien since Durin's Day!’

When his eyes were in turn uncovered, Frodo looked up and caught his breath. They were standing in an open space. To the left stood a great mound, covered with a sward of grass as green as Springtime in the Elder Days. Upon it, as a double crown, grew two circles of trees: the outer had bark of snowy white, and were leafless but beautiful in their shapely nakedness

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ness; the inner were mallorn-trees of great height, still arrayed in pale gold. High amid the branches of a towering tree that stood in the centre of all there gleamed

a white flet. At the feet of the trees, and all about the green hillsides the grass was studded with small golden flowers shaped like stars. Among them, nodding on slender stalks, were other flowers, white and palest green: they glimmered as a mist amid the rich hue of the grass. Over all the sky was blue, and the sun of afternoon glowed upon the hill and cast long green shadows beneath the trees.

‘Behold! You are come to Cerin Amroth’, said Haldir. ‘For this is the heart of the ancient realm as it was long ago, and here is the mound of Amroth, where in happier days his high house was built. Here ever bloom the winter flowers in the unfading grass: the yellow *elanor*, and the pale *niphredil*. Here we will stay awhile, and come to the city of the Galadhrim at dusk.’

The others cast themselves down upon the fragrant grass, but Frodo stood awhile still lost in wonder. It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured for ever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. In winter here no heart could mourn for summer or for spring. No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain.

He turned and saw that Sam was now standing beside him, looking round with a puzzled expression, and rubbing his eyes as if he was not sure that he was awake. ‘It’s sunlight and bright day, right enough’, he said. ‘I thought that Elves were all for moon and stars: but this is more elvish than anything I ever heard tell of. I feel as if I was inside a song. if you take my meaning.’

Haldir looked at them, and he seemed indeed to take the meaning of both thought and word. He smiled. ‘You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim’, he said. ‘Would it please you to climb with me up Cerin Amroth?’

They followed him as he stepped lightly up the grass-clad slopes. Though he walked and breathed, and about him living leaves and flowers were stirred by the same cool wind as fanned his face, Frodo felt that he was in a timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness. 355

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When he had gone and passed again into the outer world, still Frodo the wanderer from the Shire would walk there, upon the grass among *elanor* and *niphredil* in fair Lothlórien.

They entered the circle of white trees. As they did so the South Wind blew upon Cerin Amroth and sighed among the branches. Frodo stood still, hearing far off great seas upon beaches that had long ago been washed away, and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth.

Haldir had gone on and was now climbing to the high flet. As Frodo prepared to follow him, he laid his hand upon the tree beside the ladder: never before had he been so suddenly and so keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree's skin and of the life within it. He felt a delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as forester nor as carpenter; it was the delight of the living tree itself.

As he stepped out at last upon the lofty platform, Haldir took his hand and turned him toward the South. 'Look this way first!' he said. Frodo looked and saw, still at some distance, a hill of many mighty trees, or a city of green towers: which it was he could not tell. Out of it, it seemed to him that the power and light came that held all the land in sway. He longed suddenly to fly like a bird to rest in the green city. Then he looked eastward and saw all the land of Lórien running down to the pale gleam of Anduin, the Great River. He lifted his eyes across the river and all the light went out, and he was back again in the world he knew. Beyond the river the land appeared flat and empty, formless and vague, until far away it rose again like a wall, dark and drear. The sun that lay on Lothlórien had no power to enlighten the shadow of that distant height.

'There lies the fastness of Southern Mirkwood', said Haldir. 'It is clad in a forest of dark fir, where the trees strive one against another and their branches rot and wither. In the midst upon a stony height stands Dol Guldur, where long the hidden Enemy had his dwelling. We fear that now it is inhabited again, and with power sevenfold. A black cloud lies often over it of late. In this high place you may see the two powers that are opposed one to another; and ever they strive now in thought, but whereas the light perceives the very heart of the darkness, its own secret has not been discovered. Not yet.' He turned and climbed swiftly down, and they followed him.

At the hill's foot Frodo found Aragorn, standing still and silent as a tree; but in

his hand was a small golden bloom of elanor, and a light was in his eyes. He was wrapped in some fair memory: and as Frodo looked at him he knew that he beheld things as they once had been in this same place. For 356

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the grim years were removed from the face of Aragorn, and he seemed clothed in white, a young lord tall and fair; and he spoke words in the Elvish tongue to one whom Frodo could not see. *Arwen vanimelda, namárië!*

he said, and then he drew a breath, and returning out of his thought he looked at Frodo and smiled.

‘Here is the heart of Elvendom on earth’, he said, ‘and here my heart dwells ever, unless there be a light beyond the dark roads that we still must tread, you and I. Come with me!’ And taking Frodo’s hand in his, he left the hill of Cerin Amroth and came there never again as living man. 357

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7

The Mirror of Galadriel

The sun was sinking behind the mountains, and the shadows were deepening in the woods, when they went on again. Their paths now went into thickets where the dusk had already gathered. Night came beneath the trees as they walked, and the Elves uncovered their silver lamps. Suddenly they came out into the open again and found themselves under a pale evening sky pricked by a few early stars. There was a wide treeless space before them, running in a great circle and bending away on either hand. Beyond it was a deep fosse lost in soft shadow, but the grass upon its brink was green, as if it glowed still in memory of the sun that had gone. Upon the further side there rose to a great height a green wall encircling a green hill thronged with mallorn-trees taller than any they had yet seen in all the land. Their height could not be guessed, but they stood up in the twilight like living towers. In their, many-tiered branches and amid their evermoving leaves countless lights were gleaming, green and gold and silver. Galadriel turned towards the Company.

Haldir turned towards the Company.

‘Welcome to Caras Galadhon!’ he said. ‘Here is the city of the Galadhrim where dwell the Lord Celeborn and Galadriel the Lady of Lórien. But we cannot enter here, for the gates do not look northward. We must go round to the southern side, and the way is not short, for the city is great.’

There was a road paved with white stone running on the outer brink of the fosse. Along this they went westward, with the city ever climbing up like a green cloud upon their left; and as the night deepened more lights sprang forth, until all the hill seemed afire with stars. They came at last to 358

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a white bridge, and crossing found the great gates of the city: they faced south-west, set between the ends of the encircling wall that here overlapped, and they were tall and strong, and hung with many lamps. Haldir knocked and spoke, and the gates opened soundlessly; but of guards Frodo could see no sign. The travellers passed within, and the gates shut behind them. They were in a deep lane between the ends of the wall, and passing quickly through it they entered the City of the Trees. No folk could they see, nor hear any feet upon the paths; but there were many voices, about them, and in the air above. Far away up on the hill they could hear the sound of singing falling from on high like soft rain upon leaves. They went along many paths and climbed many stairs, until they came to the high places and saw before them amid a wide lawn a fountain shimmering. It was lit by silver lamps that swung from the boughs of trees, and it fell into a basin of silver, from which a white stream spilled. Upon the south side of the lawn there stood the mightiest of all the trees; its great smooth bole gleamed like grey silk, and up it towered, until its first branches, far above, opened their huge limbs under shadowy clouds of leaves. Beside it a broad white ladder stood, and at its foot three Elves were seated. They sprang up as the travellers approached, and Frodo saw that they were tall and clad in grey mail, and from their shoulders hung long white cloaks.

‘Here dwell Celeborn and Galadriel’, said Haldir. ‘It is their wish that you should ascend and speak with them.’

One of the Elf-wardens then blew a clear note on a small horn, and it was answered three times from far above. ‘I will go first’ said Haldir. ‘Let Frodo

answered three times from far above. 'I will go first', said Haldir. 'Let Frodo come next and with him Legolas. The others may follow as they wish. It is a long climb for those that are not accustomed to such stairs, but you may rest upon the way.'

As he climbed slowly up Frodo passed many flets: some on one side, some on another, and some set about the bole of the tree, so that the ladder passed through them. At a great height above the ground he came to a wide *talan*, like the deck of a great ship. On it was built a house, so large that almost it would have served for a hall of Men upon the earth. He entered behind Haldir, and found that he was in a chamber of oval shape, in the midst of which grew the trunk of the great mallorn, now tapering towards its crown, and yet making still a pillar of wide girth. The chamber was filled with a soft light; its walls were green and silver and its roof of gold. Many Elves were seated there. On two chairs beneath the bole of the tree and canopied by a living bough there sat, side by side, Celeborn and Galadriel. They stood up to greet their guests, after 359

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the manner of Elves, even those who were accounted mighty kings. Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the Lady was of deep gold, and the hair of the Lord Celeborn was of silver long and bright; but no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory.

Haldir led Frodo before them, and the Lord welcomed him in his own tongue. The Lady Galadriel said no word but looked long upon his face.

'Sit now beside my chair, Frodo of the Shire!' said Celeborn. 'When all have come we will speak together.'

Each of the companions he greeted courteously by name as they entered.

'Welcome Aragorn son of Arathorn!' he said. 'It is eight and thirty years of the world outside since you came to this land; and those years lie heavy on you. But the end is near, for good or ill. Here lay aside your burden for a while!'

'Welcome son of Thranduil! Too seldom do my kindred journey hither from the North'

‘Welcome Gimli son of Glóin! It is long indeed since we saw one of Durin’s folk in Caras Galadhon. But today we have broken our long law. May it be a sign that though the world is now dark better days are at hand, and that friendship shall be renewed between our peoples.’ Gimli bowed low.

When all the guests were seated before his chair the Lord looked at them again. ‘Here there are eight’, he said. ‘Nine were to set out: so said the messages. But maybe there has been some change of counsel that we have not heard. Elrond is far away, and darkness gathers between us, and all this year the shadows have grown longer.’

‘Nay, there was no change of counsel’, said the Lady Galadriel speaking for the first time. Her voice was clear and musical, but deeper than woman’s wont. ‘Gandalf the Grey set out with the Company, but he did not pass the borders of this land. Now tell us where he is; for I much desired to speak with him again. But I cannot see him from afar, unless he comes within the fences of Lothlórien: a grey mist is about him, and the ways of his feet and of his mind are hidden from me.’

‘Alas!’ said Aragorn. ‘Gandalf the Grey fell into shadow. He remained in Moria and did not escape.’

At these words all the Elves in the hall cried aloud in grief and amazement. ‘These are evil tidings’, said Celeborn, ‘the most evil that have been

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spoken here in long years full of grievous deeds.’ He turned to Haldir. ‘Why has nothing of this been told to me before?’ he asked in the Elven-tongue.

‘We have not spoken to Haldir of our deeds or our purpose’, said Legolas. ‘At first we were weary and danger was too close behind and afterwards we almost forgot our grief for a time, as we walked in gladness on the fair paths of Lórien.’

‘Yet our grief is great and our loss cannot be mended’, said Frodo.

‘Gandalf was our guide, and he led us through Moria; and when our escape

seemed beyond hope he saved us, and he tell.'

'Tell us now the full tale!' said Celeborn:

Then Aragorn recounted all that had happened upon the pass of Caradhras, and in the days that followed; and he spoke of Balin and his book, and the fight in the Chamber of Mazarbul, and the fire, and the narrow bridge, and the coming of the Terror. 'An evil of the Ancient World it seemed, such as I have never seen before', said Aragorn. 'It was both a shadow and a flame, strong and terrible.'

'It was a Balrog of Morgoth', said Legolas; 'of all elf-banes the most deadly, save the One who sits in the Dark Tower.'

'Indeed I saw upon the bridge that which haunts our darkest dreams I saw Durin's Bane', said Gimli in a low voice, and dread was in his eyes.

'Alas!' said Celeborn. 'We long have feared that under Caradhras a terror slept. But had I known that the Dwarves had stirred up this evil in Moria again, I would have forbidden you to pass the northern borders, you and all that went with you. And if it were possible, one would say that at the last Gandalf fell from wisdom into folly, going needlessly into the net of Moria.'

'He would be rash indeed that said that thing', said Galadriel gravely.

'Needless were none of the deeds of Gandalf in life. Those that followed him knew not his mind and cannot report his full purpose. But however it may be with the guide, the followers are blameless. Do not repent of your welcome to the Dwarf. If our folk had been exiled long and far from Lothlórien, who of the Galadhrim, even Celeborn the Wise, would pass nigh and would not wish to look upon their ancient home, though it had become an abode of dragons?

lies, across the river, but Shadowfax knows the way through every fen and hollow.'

For many hours they rode on through the meads and riverlands. Often the grass was so high that it reached above the knees of the riders, and their steeds seemed to be swimming in a greygreen sea. They came upon many hidden pools, and broad acres of sedge waving above wet and treacherous bogs; but Shadowfax found the way, and the other horses followed in his swath. Slowly the sun fell from the sky down into the West. Looking out over the great plain, far away the riders saw it for a moment like a red fire sinking into the grass. Low upon the edge of sight shoulders of the mountains glinted red upon either side. A smoke seemed to rise up and darken the sun's disc to the hue of blood, as if it had kindled the grass as it passed down under the rim of earth.

'There lies the Gap of Rohan', said Gandalf. 'It is now almost due west of us. That way lies Isengard.'

'I see a great smoke', said Legolas. 'What may that be?'

'Battle and war!' said Gandalf. 'Ride on!'

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6

The King of the Golden Hall

They rode on through sunset, and slow dusk, and gathering night. When at last they halted and dismounted, even Aragorn was stiff and weary. Gandalf only allowed them a few hours' rest. Legolas and Gimli slept and Aragorn lay flat, stretched upon his back; but Gandalf stood, leaning on his staff, gazing into the darkness, east and west. All was silent, and there was no sign or sound of living thing. The night was barred with long clouds, fleeting on a chill wind, when they arose again. Under the cold moon they went on once more, as swift as by the light of day. Hours passed and still they rode on. Gimli nodded and would have fallen from his seat, if Gandalf had not clutched and shaken him. Hasufel and

Arod, weary but proud, followed their tireless leader, a grey shadow before them hardly to be seen. The miles went by. The waxing moon sank into the cloudy West.

A bitter chill came into the air. Slowly in the East the dark faded to a cold grey. Red shafts of light leapt above the black walls of the Eryn Muil far away upon their left. Dawn came clear and bright; a wind swept across their path, rushing through the bent grasses. Suddenly Shadowfax stood still and neighed. Gandalf pointed ahead.

‘Look!’ he cried, and they lifted their tired eyes. Before them stood the mountains of the South: white-tipped and streaked with black. The grasslands rolled against the hills that clustered at their feet, and flowed up into many valleys still dim and dark, untouched by the light of dawn, winding their way into the heart of the great mountains. Immediately before the travellers the widest of these glens opened like a long gulf among the hills. Far 511

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inward they glimpsed a tumbled mountain-mass with one tall peak; at the mouth of the vale there stood like sentinel a lonely height. About its feet there flowed, as a thread of silver, the stream that issued from the dale; upon its brow they caught, still far away, a glint in the rising sun, a glimmer of gold. ‘Speak, Legolas!’ said Gandalf. ‘Tell us what you see there before us!’

Legolas gazed ahead, shading his eyes from the level shafts of the new-risen sun. ‘I see a white stream that comes down from the snows’, he said. ‘Where it issues from the shadow of the vale a green hill rises upon the east. A dike and mighty wall and thorny fence encircle it. Within there rise the roofs of houses; and in the midst, set upon a green terrace, there stands aloft a great hall of Men. And it seems to my eyes that it is thatched with gold. The light of it shines far over the land. Golden, too, are the posts of its doors. There men in bright mail stand; but all else within the courts are yet asleep.’

‘Edoras those courts are called’, said Gandalf, ‘and Meduseld is that golden hall. There dwells Théoden son of Thengel, King of the Mark of Rohan. We are come with the rising of the day. Now the road lies plain to see before us. But we must ride more warily; for war is abroad, and the Rohirrim, the Horse-lords, do not

sleep, even if it seem so from afar. Draw no weapon, speak no haughty word, I counsel you all, until we are come before Théoden's seat.'

The morning was bright and clear about them, and birds were singing, when the travellers came to the stream. It ran down swiftly into the plain, and beyond the feet of the hills turned across their path in a wide bend, flowing away east to feed the Entwash far off in its reed-choked beds. The land was green: in the wet meads and along the grassy borders of the stream grew many willow-trees. Already in this southern land they were blushing red at their fingertips. Feeling the approach of spring. Over the stream there was a ford between low banks much trampled by the passage of horses. The travellers passed over and came upon a wide rutted track leading towards the uplands.

At the foot of the walled hill the way ran under the shadow of many mounds, high and green. Upon their western sides the grass was white as with a drifted snow: small flowers sprang there like countless stars amid the turf.

'Look!' said Gandalf. 'How fair are the bright eyes in the grass!

Evermind they are called, *simbelmynë* in this land of Men, for they blossom in all the seasons of the year, and grow where dead men rest. Behold! we are come to the great barrows where the sires of Théoden sleep.' 'Seven 512

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mounds upon the left, and nine upon the right', said Aragorn. 'Many long lives of men it is since the golden hall was built.'

'Five hundred times have the red leaves fallen in Mirkwood in my home since then', said Legolas, 'and but a little while does that seem to us.'

'But to the Riders of the Mark it seems so long ago', said Aragorn,

'that the raising of this house is but a memory of song, and the years before are lost in the mist of time. Now they call this land their home, their own, and their speech is sundered from their northern kin.' Then he began to chant softly in a slow tongue unknown to the Elf and Dwarf; yet they listened, for there was a strong music in it.

‘That, I guess, is the language of the Rohirrim’, said Legolas; ‘for it is like to this land itself; rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains. But I cannot guess what it means, save that it is laden with the sadness of Mortal Men.’

‘It runs thus in the Common Speech’, said Aragorn, ‘as near as I can make it.

Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?

Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing?

Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?

Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?

They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow; The days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow. Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood burning, Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning?

Thus spoke a forgotten poet long ago in Rohan, recalling how tall and fair was Eorl the Young, who rode down out of the North; and there were wings upon the feet of his steed, Felaróf, father of horses. So men still sing in the evening.’

With these words the travellers passed the silent mounds. Following the winding way up the green shoulders of the hills, they came at last to the wide wind-swept walls and the gates of Edoras.

There sat many men in bright mail, who sprang at once to their feet and barred the way with spears. ‘Stay, strangers here unknown!’ they cried in the tongue of the Riddermark, demanding the names and errand of the strangers. Wonder was in their eyes but little friendliness; and they looked darkly upon Gandalf.

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‘Well do I understand your speech’, he answered in the same language;

‘yet few strangers do so. Why then do you not speak in the Common Tongue, as is the custom in the West, if you wish to be answered?’

‘It is the will of Théoden King that none should enter his gates, save those who know our tongue and are our friends’, replied one of the guards.

‘None are welcome here in days of war but our own folk, and those that come from Mundburg in the land of Gondor. Who are you that come heedless over the plain thus strangely clad, riding horses like to our own horses? Long have we kept guard here, and we have watched you from afar. Never have we seen other riders so strange, nor any horse more proud than is one of these that bear you. He is One of the *Mearas*, unless our eyes are cheated by some spell. Say, are you not a wizard, some spy from Saruman, or phantoms of his craft? Speak now and be swift!’

‘We are no phantoms’, said Aragorn, ‘nor do your eyes cheat you. For indeed these are your own horses that we ride, as you knew well are you asked, I guess. But seldom does thief ride home to the stable. Here are Hasufel and Arod, that Éomer, the Third Marshal of the Mark, lent to us, only two days ago. We bring them back now, even as we promised him. Has not Éomer then returned and given warning of our coming?’

A troubled look came into the guard’s eyes. ‘Of Éomer I have naught to say’, he answered. ‘If what you tell me is truth, then doubtless Théoden will have heard of it. Maybe your coming was not wholly unlooked-for. It is but two nights ago that Wormtongue came to us and said that by the will of Théoden no stranger should pass these gates.’

‘Wormtongue?’ said Gandalf, looking sharply at the guard. ‘Say no more! My errand is not to Wormtongue, but to the Lord of the Mark himself. I am in haste. Will you not go or send to say that we are come?’ His eyes glinted under his deep brows as he bent his gaze upon the man.

‘Yes, I will go’, he answered slowly. ‘But what names shall I report?’

And what shall I say of you? Old and weary you seem now, and yet you are fell and grim beneath, I deem’

‘Well do you see and speak’, said the wizard. ‘For I am Gandalf. I have returned. And behold! I too bring back a horse. Here is Shadowfax the Great, whom no

other hand can tame. And here beside me is Aragorn son of Arathorn, the heir of Kings, and it is to Mundburg that he goes. Here also are Legolas the Elf and Gimli the Dwarf, our comrades. Go now and say to your master that we are at his gates and would have speech with him, if he will permit us to come into his hall.’ ‘Strange names you give indeed!

But I will report them as you bid and learn my master’s will’, said the guard.

‘Wait here a little while, and I will bring you such answer as seems good to 514

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him. Do not hope too much! These are dark days.’ He went swiftly away, leaving the strangers in the watchful keeping of his comrades. After some time he returned. ‘Follow me!’ he said. ‘Théoden gives you leave to enter; but any weapon that you bear; be it only a staff, you must leave on the threshold. The doorwardens will keep them.’

The dark gates were swung open. The travellers entered, walking in file behind their guide. They found a broad path, paved with hewn stones, now winding upward, now climbing in short flights of well-laid steps. Many houses built of wood and many dark doors they passed. Beside the way in a stone channel a stream of clear water flowed, sparkling and chattering. At length they came to the crown of the hill. There stood a high platform above a green terrace, at the foot of which a bright spring gushed from a stone carved in the likeness of a horse’s head; beneath was a wide basin from which the water spilled and fed the falling stream. Up the green terrace went a stair of stone, high and broad, and on either side of the topmost step were stone-hewn seats. There sat other guards, with drawn swords laid upon their knees. Their golden hair was braided on their shoulders the sun was blazoned upon their green shields, their long corslets were burnished bright, and when they rose taller they seemed than mortal men.

‘There are the doors before you’, said the guide. ‘I must return now to my duty at the gate. Farewell! And may the Lord of the Mark be gracious to you!’

He turned and went swiftly back down the road. The others climbed the long stair under the eyes of the tall watchmen. Silent they stood now above and spoke no word, until Gandalf stepped out upon the paved terrace at the stairs head.

Then suddenly with clear voices they spoke a courteous greeting in their own tongue. Hail, corners from afar!’ they said, and they turned the hilts of their swords towards the travellers in token of peace. Green gems flashed in the sunlight. Then one of the guards stepped forward and spoke in the Common Speech.

‘I am the Doorward of Théoden’, he said. ‘Háma is my name. Here I must bid you lay aside your weapons before you enter.’

Then Legolas gave into his hand his silver-hafted knife, his quiver and his bow. ‘Keep these well’, he said, ‘for they come from the Golden Wood and the Lady of Lothlórien gave them to me.’

Wonder came into the man’s eyes, and he laid the weapons hastily by the wall, as if he feared to handle them. ‘No man will touch them I promise you’, he said.

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Aragorn stood a while hesitating. ‘It is not my will’, he said, ‘to put aside my sword or to deliver Andúril to the hand of any other man.’

‘It is the will of Théoden’, said Háma.

‘It is not clear to me that the will of Théoden son of Thengel even though he be lord of the Mark, should prevail over the will of Aragorn son of Arathorn, Elendil’s heir of Gondor.’

‘This is the house of Théoden, not of Aragorn, even were he King of Gondor in the seat of Denethor’, said Háma, stepping swiftly before the doors and barring the way. His sword was now in his hand and the point towards the strangers.

‘This is idle talk’, said Gandalf. ‘Needless is Théoden’s demand, but it is useless to refuse. A king will have his way in his own hall, be it folly or wisdom.’

‘Truly’, said Aragorn. ‘And I would do as the master of the house bade me, were this only a woodman’s cot, if I bore now any sword but Andúril.’

‘Whatever its name may be’, said Háma, ‘here you shall lay it, if you would not fight alone against all the men in Edoras.’

‘Not alone!’ said Gimli, fingering the blade of his axe, and looking darkly up at the guard, as if he were a young tree that Gimli had a mind to fell. ‘Not alone!’

‘Come, come!’ said Gandalf. ‘We are all friends here. Or should be; for the laughter of Mordor will be our only reward, if we quarrel. My errand is pressing. Here at least is *my* sword, goodman Háma. Keep it well. Glamdring it is called, for the Elves made it long ago. Now let me pass. Come, Aragorn!’

Slowly Aragorn unbuckled his belt and himself set his sword upright against the wall. ‘Here I set it’, he said; ‘but I command you not to touch it, nor to permit any other to lay hand on it. In this elvish heath dwells the Blade that was Broken and has been made again. Telchar first wrought it in the deeps of time. Death shall come to any man that draws Elendil’s sword save Elendil’s heir.’

The guard stepped back and looked with amazement on Aragorn. ‘It seems that you are come on the wings of song out of the forgotten days he said. It shall be, lord, as you command.’

‘Well’, said Gimli, ‘if it has Andúril to keep it company, my axe may stay here, too, without shame’; and he laid it on the floor. ‘Now then, if all is as you wish, let us go and speak with your master.’

The guard still hesitated. ‘Your staff’, he said to Gandalf. ‘Forgive me, but that too must be left at the doors.’

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‘Foolishness!’ said Gandalf. ‘Prudence is one thing, but discourtesy is another. I am old. If I may not lean on my stick as I go, then I will sit out here, until it pleases Théoden to hobble out himself to speak with me.’

Aragorn laughed. ‘Every man has something too dear to trust to another. But would you part an old man from his support? Come, will you not let us enter?’

‘The staff in the hand of a wizard may be more than a prop for age’ said Háma. He looked hard at the ash-staff on which Gandalf leaned. ‘Yet in doubt a man of worth will trust to his own wisdom. I believe you are friends and folk worthy of honour, who have no evil purpose. You may go in.’

The guards now lifted the heavy bars of the doors and swung them slowly inwards grumbling on their great hinges. The travellers entered. Inside it seemed dark and warm after the clear air upon the hill. The hall was long and wide and filled with shadows and half lights; mighty pillars upheld its lofty roof. But here and there bright sunbeams fell in glimmering shafts from the eastern windows, high under the deep eaves. Through the louver in the roof, above the thin wisps of issuing smoke, the sky showed pale and blue. As their eyes changed, the travellers perceived that the floor was paved with stones of many hues; branching runes and strange devices intertwined beneath their feet. They saw now that the pillars were richly carved, gleaming dully with gold and half-seen colours. Many woven cloths were hung upon the walls, and over their wide spaces marched figures of ancient legend, some dim with years, some darkling in the shade. But upon one form the sunlight fell: a young man upon a white horse. He was blowing a great horn, and his yellow hair was flying in the wind. The horse’s head was lifted, and its nostrils were wide and red as it neighed, smelling battle afar. Foaming water, green and white, rushed and curled about its knees.

‘Behold Eorl the Young!’ said Aragorn. ‘Thus he rode out of the North to the Battle of the Field of Celebrant.’

Now the four companions went forward, past the clear wood-fire burning upon the long hearth in the midst of the hall. Then they halted. At the far end of the house, beyond the hearth and facing north towards the doors, was a dais with three steps; and in the middle of the dais was a great gilded chair. Upon it sat a man so bent with age that he seemed almost a dwarf; but his white hair was long and thick and fell in great braids from beneath a thin golden circle set upon his brow. In the centre upon his forehead shone a single white diamond. His beard was laid like snow upon his knees; but his eyes still burned with a bright light, glinting as he gazed at 517

the strangers. Behind his chair stood a woman clad in white. At his feet upon the steps sat a wizened figure of a man, with a pale wise face and heavy-lidded eyes.

There was a silence. The old man did not move in his chair. At length Gandalf spoke. 'Hail, Théoden son of Thengel! I have returned. For behold! the storm comes, and now all friends should gather together, lest each singly be destroyed.'

Slowly the old man rose to his feet, leaning heavily upon a short black staff with a handle of white bone; and now the strangers saw that, bent though he was, he was still tall and must in youth have been high and proud indeed.

'I greet you', he said, 'and maybe you look for welcome. But truth to tell your welcome is doubtful here, Master Gandalf. You have ever been a herald of woe. Troubles follow you like crows, and ever the oftener the worse. I will not deceive you: when I heard that Shadowfax had come back riderless, I rejoiced at the return of the horse, but still more at the lack of the rider; and when Éomer brought the tidings that you had gone at last to your long home, I did not mourn. But news from afar is seldom sooth. Here you come again! And with you come evils worse than before, as might be expected. Why should I welcome you, Gandalf Stormcrow? Tell me that.' Slowly he sat down again in his chair.

'You speak justly, lord', said the pale man sitting upon the steps of the dais. 'It is not yet five days since the bitter tidings came that Théodred your son was slain upon the West Marches: your right hand, Second Marshal Of the Mark. In Éomer there is little trust. Few men would be left to guard your walls, if he had been allowed to rule. And even now we learn from Gondor that the Dark Lord is stirring in the East. Such is the hour in which this wanderer chooses to return. Why indeed should we welcome you, Master Stormcrow? *Láthspell* I name you, Ill-news; and ill news is an ill guest they say.' He laughed grimly, as he lifted his heavy lids for a moment and gazed on the strangers with dark eyes.

'You are held wise, my friend Wormtongue, and are doubtless a great support to your master', answered Gandalf in a soft voice. 'Yet in two ways may a man come with evil tidings. He may be a worker of evil; or he may be such as leaves well alone, and comes only to bring aid in time of need.'

'That is so', said Wormtongue; 'but there is a third kind: pickers of bones, meddlers in other men's sorrows, carrion-fowl that grow fat on war. What aid have you ever brought, Stormcrow? And what aid do you bring now? It was aid

from us that you sought last time that you were here. Then my lord bade you
Choose any horse that you would and be gone; and to 518

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the wonder of all you took Shadowfax in your insolence. My lord was sorely
grieved; yet to some it seemed that to speed you from the land the price was not
too great. I guess that it is likely to turn out the same once more: you will seek
aid rather than render it. Do you bring men? Do you bring horses, swords,
spears? That I would call aid; that is our present need. But who are these that
follow at your tail? Three ragged wanderers in grey, and you yourself the most
beggar-like of the four!’

‘The courtesy of your hall is somewhat lessened of late, Théoden son of
Thengel’, said Gandalf. ‘Has not the messenger from your gate reported the
names of my companions? Seldom has any lord of Rohan received three such
guests. Weapons they have laid at your doors that are worth many a mortal man,
even the mightiest. Grey is their raiment, for the Elves clad them, and thus they
have passed through the shadow of great perils to your hall.’

‘Then it is true, as Éomer reported, that you are in league with the Sorceress of
the Golden Wood?’ said Wormtongue. ‘It is not to be wondered at: webs of
deceit were ever woven in Dwimordene.’

Gimli strode a pace forward, but felt suddenly the hand of Gandalf clutch him by
the shoulder, and he halted, standing stiff as stone. *In Dwimordene, in Lórien*

Seldom have walked the feet of Men,

Few mortal eyes have seen the light

That lies there ever, long and bright.

Galadriel! Galadriel!

Clear is the water of your well;

White is the star in your white hand;

Unmarred, unstained is leaf and land

In Dwimordene, in Lórien

More fair than thoughts of Mortal Men.

Thus Gandalf softly sang, and then suddenly he changed. Casting his tattered cloak aside, he stood up and leaned no longer on his staff; and he spoke in a clear cold voice. 'The wise speak only of what they know, Gríma son of Gálmód. A witless worm have you become. Therefore be silent, and keep your forked tongue behind your teeth. I have not passed through fire and death to bandy crooked words with a serving-man till the lightning falls.' He raised his staff. There was a roll of thunder. The sunlight was blotted out from the eastern windows; the whole hall became suddenly dark as 519

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night. The fire faded to sullen embers. Only Gandalf could be seen, standing white and tall before the blackened hearth. In the gloom they heard the hiss of Wormtongue's voice: 'Did I not counsel you, lord, to forbid his staff? That fool, Háma, has betrayed us!'

There was a flash as if lightning had cloven the roof. Then all was silent. Wormtongue sprawled on his face.

'Now Théoden son of Thengel, will you hearken to me?' said Gandalf.

'Do you ask for help?' He lifted his staff and pointed to a high window. There the darkness seemed to clear, and through the opening could be seen, high and far, a patch of shining sky. 'Not all is dark. Take courage, Lord of the Mark; for better help you will not find. No counsel have I to give to those that despair. Yet counsel I could give, and words I could speak to you. Will you hear them? They are not for all ears. I bid you come out before your doors and look abroad. Too long have you sat in shadows and trusted to twisted tales and crooked promptings.'

Slowly Théoden left his chair. A faint light grew in the hall again. The woman hastened to the king's side, taking his arm, and with faltering steps the old man came down from the dais and passed softly through the hall. Wormtongue

came down from the eais and paced sorry through the hall. wormitongue remained lying on the floor. They came to the doors and Gandalf knocked.

‘Open!’ he cried. ‘The Lord of the Mark comes forth!’

The doors rolled back and a keen air came whistling in. A wind was blowing on the hill. ‘Send your guards down to the stairs foot’, said Gandalf. ‘And you, lady, leave him a while with me. I will care for him.’

‘Go, Éowyn sister-daughter!’ said the old king. ‘The time for fear is past.’

The woman turned and went slowly into the house. As she passed the doors she turned and looked back. Grave and thoughtful was her glance, as she looked on the king with cool pity in her eyes. Very fair was her face, and her long hair was like a river of gold. Slender and tall she was in her white robe girt with silver; but strong she seemed and stern as steel, a daughter of kings. Thus Aragorn for the first time in the full light of day beheld Éowyn, Lady of Rohan, and thought her fair, fair and cold, like a morning of pale spring that is not yet come to womanhood. And she now was suddenly aware of him: tall heir of kings, wise with many winters, greycloaked. Hiding a power that yet she felt. For a moment still as stone she stood, then turning swiftly she was gone.

‘Now, lord’, said Gandalf, ‘look out upon your land! Breathe the free air again!’

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From the porch upon the top of the high terrace they could see beyond the stream the green fields of Rohan fading into distant grey. Curtains of wind-blown rain were slanting down. The sky above and to the west was still dark with thunder, and lightning far away flickered among the tops of hidden hills. But the wind had shifted to the north, and already the storm that had come out of the East was receding, rolling away southward to the sea. Suddenly through a rent in the clouds behind them a shaft of sun stabbed down. The falling showers gleamed like silver, and far away the river glittered like a shimmering glass.

‘It is not so dark here’, said Théoden.

‘No’, said Gandalf. ‘Nor does age lie so heavily on your shoulders as some would have you think. Cast aside your prop!’

From the king’s hand the black staff fell clattering on the stones. He drew himself up, slowly, as a man that is stiff from long bending over some dull toil. Now tall and straight he stood, and his eyes were blue as he looked into the opening sky.

‘Dark have been my dreams of late’, he said, ‘but I feel as one newawakened. I would now that you had come before, Gandalf. For I fear that already you have come too late, only to see the last days of my house. Not long now shall stand the high hall which Brego son of Eorl built. Fire shall devour the high seat. What is to be done?’

‘Much’, said Gandalf. ‘But first send for Éomer. Do I not guess rightly that you hold him prisoner, by the counsel of Gríma, of him that all save you name the Wormtongue?’

‘It is true’, said Théoden. ‘He had rebelled against my commands, and threatened death to Gríma in my hall.’

‘A man may love you and yet not love Wormtongue or his counsels’

said Gandalf.

‘That may be. I will do as you ask. Call Háma to me. Since he proved untrusty as a doorward, let him become an errand-runner. The guilty shall bring the guilty to judgement’, said Théoden, and his voice was grim, yet he looked at Gandalf and smiled and as he did so many lines of care were smoothed away and did not return.

When Háma had been summoned and had gone, Gandalf led

Théoden to a stone seat, and then sat himself before the king upon the topmost stair. Aragorn and his companions stood nearby.

‘There is no time to tell all that you should hear’, said Gandalf. ‘Yet if my hope is not cheated, a time will come ere long when I can speak more fully. Behold! you are come into a peril greater even than the wit of Wormtongue could weave into your dreams. But see! you dream no longer. 521

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You live. Gondor and Rohan do not stand alone. The enemy is strong beyond our reckoning, yet we have a hope at which he has not guessed.'

Quickly now Gandalf spoke. His voice was low and secret, and none save the king heard what he said. But ever as he spoke the light shone brighter in Théoden's eye, and at the last he rose from his seat to his full height, and Gandalf beside him, and together they looked out from the high place towards the East.

'Verily', said Gandalf, now in a loud voice, keen and clear, 'that way lies our hope, where sits our greatest fear. *Doom* hangs still on a thread. Yet hope there is still, if we can but stand unconquered for a little while.'

The others too now turned their eyes eastward. Over the sundering leagues of land, far away they gazed to the edge of sight, and hope and fear bore their thoughts still on, beyond dark mountains to the Land of Shadow. Where now was the Ring-bearer? How thin indeed was the thread upon which *doom* still hung! It seemed to Legolas, as he strained his farseeing eyes, that he caught a glint of white: far away perchance the sun twinkled on a pinnacle of the Tower of Guard. And further still, endlessly remote and yet a present threat, there was a tiny tongue of flame. Slowly Théoden sat down again, as if weariness still struggled to master him against the will of Gandalf. He turned and looked at his great house. 'Alas!' he said, 'that these evil days should be mine, and should come in my old age instead of that peace which I have earned. Alas for Boromir the brave! The young perish and the old linger, withering.' He clutched his knees with his wrinkled hands.

'Your fingers would remember their old strength better, if they grasped a swordhilt', said Gandalf.

Théoden rose and put his hand to his side; but no sword hung at his belt. 'Where has Gríma stowed it?' he muttered under his breath.

'Take this, dear lord!' said a clear voice. 'It was ever at your service.'

Two men had come softly up the stair and stood now a few steps from the top.

Eomer was there. No helm was on his head, no mail was on his breast, but in his hand he held a drawn sword; and as he knelt he offered the hilt to his master.

‘How comes this?’ said Théoden sternly. He turned towards Éomer and the men looked in wonder at him, standing now proud and erect. Where was the old man whom they had left crouching in his chair or leaning on his stick?

‘It is my doing, lord’, said Háma, trembling. I understood that Éomer was to be set free. Such joy was in my heart that maybe I have erred. Yet, 522

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since he was free again, and he a Marshal of the Mark,! brought him his sword as he bade me.’

‘To lay at your feet, my lord’, said Éomer.

For a moment of silence Théoden stood looking down at Éomer as he knelt still before him. Neither moved.

‘Will you not take the sword?’ said Gandalf.

Slowly Théoden stretched forth his hand. As his fingers took the hilt, it seemed to the watchers that firmness and strength returned to his thin arm. Suddenly he lifted the blade and swung it shimmering and whistling in the air. Then he gave a great cry. His voice rang clear as he chanted in the tongue of Rohan a call to arms.

Arise now, arise, Riders of Théoden!

Dire deeds awake, dark is it eastward.

Let horse be bridled, horn be sounded!

Forth Eorlingas!

The guards, thinking that they were summoned, sprang up the stair. They looked at their lord in amazement, and then as one man they drew their swords and laid them at his feet. ‘Command us!’ they said.

‘Westu Théoden hál!’ cried Éomer. ‘It is a joy to us to see you return into your own. Never again shall it be said, Gandalf, that you come only with grief!’

‘Take back your sword, Éomer, sister-son!’ said the king. ‘Go, Háma, and seek my own sword! Gríma has it in his keeping. Bring him to me also. Now, Gandalf, you said that you had counsel to give, if I would hear it. What is your counsel?’

‘You have yourself already taken it’, answered Gandalf. ‘To put your trust in Éomer, rather than in a man of crooked mind. To cast aside regret and fear. To do the deed at hand. Every man that can ride should be sent west at once, as Éomer counselled you: we must first destroy the threat of Saruman, while we have time. If we fail, we fall. If we succeed - then we will face the next task. Meanwhile your people that are left, the women and the children and the old, should stay to the refuges that you have in the mountains. Were they not prepared against just such an evil day as this? Let them take provision, but delay not, nor burden themselves with treasures, great or small. It is their lives that are at stake.’

‘This counsel seems good to me now’, said Théoden. ‘Let all my folk get ready! But you my guests-truly you said, Gandalf, that the courtesy of my hall is lessened. You have ridden through the night, and the morning 523

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wears away. You have had neither sleep nor food. A guest-house shall be made ready: there you shall sleep, when you have eaten.’

‘Nay, lord’, said Aragorn. ‘There is no rest yet for the weary. The men of Rohan must ride forth today, and we will ride with them, axe, sword, and bow. We did not bring them to rest against your wall, Lord of the Mark. And I promised Éomer that my sword and his should be drawn together.’

‘Now indeed there is hope of victory!’ said Éomer.

‘Hope, yes’, said Gandalf. ‘But Isengard is strong. And other perils draw ever nearer. Do not delay, Théoden, when we are gone. Lead your people swiftly to the Hold of Dunharrow in the hills!’

‘Nay, Gandalf!’ said the king. ‘You do not know your own skill in healing. It shall not be so. I myself will go to war, to fall in the front of the battle, if it must be. Thus shall I sleep better.’

‘Then even the defeat of Rohan will be glorious in song’, said Aragorn. The armed men that stood near clashed their weapons, crying:

‘The Lord of the Mark will ride! Forth Eorlingas!’

‘But your people must not be both unarmed and shepherdless’ said Gandalf. ‘Who shall guide them and govern them in your place?’

‘I will take thought for that ere I go’, answered Théoden. ‘Here comes my counsellor.’

At that moment Háma came again from the hall. Behind him cringing between two other men, came Gríma the Wormtongue. His face was very white. His eyes blinked in the sunlight. Háma knelt and presented to Théoden a long sword in a scabbard clasped with gold and set with green gems. ‘Here, lord, is Herugrim, your ancient blade’, he said. ‘It was found in his chest. Loth was he to render up the keys. Many other things are there which men have missed.’

‘You lie’, said Wormtongue. ‘And this sword your master himself gave into my keeping.’

‘And he now requires it of you again’, said Théoden. ‘Does that displease you?’

‘Assuredly not, lord’, said Wormtongue. ‘I care for you and yours as best I may. But do not weary yourself, or tax too heavily your strength. Let others deal with these irksome guests. Your meat is about to be set on the board. Will you not go to it?’

‘I will’, said Théoden. ‘And let food for my guests be set on the board beside me. The host rides today. Send the heralds forth! Let them summon all who dwell nigh! Every man and strong lad able to bear arms, all who have horses, let them be ready in the saddle at the gate ere the second hour from noon!’

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‘Dear lord!’ cried Wormtongue. ‘It is as I feared. This wizard has bewitched you. Are none to be left to defend the Golden Hall of your fathers, and all your treasure? None to guard the Lord of the Mark?’

‘If this is bewitchment’, said Théoden, ‘it seems to me more wholesome than your whisperings. Your leechcraft ere long would have had me walking on all fours like a beast. No, not one shall be left, not even Gríma. Gríma shall ride too. Go! You have yet time to clean the rust from your sword.’

‘Mercy, lord!’ whined Wormtongue, grovelling on the ground. ‘Have pity on one worn out in your service. Send me not from your side! I at least will stand by you when all others have gone. Do not send your faithful Gríma away!’

‘You have my pity’, said Théoden. ‘And I do not send you from my side. I go myself to war with my men. I bid you come with me and prove your faith.’

Wormtongue looked from face to face. In his eyes was the hunted look of a beast seeking some gap in the ring of his enemies. He licked his lips with a long pale tongue. ‘Such a resolve might be expected from a lord of the House of Eorl, old though he be’, he said. ‘But those who truly love him would spare his failing years. Yet I see that I come too late. Others, whom the death of my lord would perhaps grieve less, have already persuaded him. If I cannot undo their work, hear me at least in this, lord! One who knows your mind and honours your commands should be left in Edoras. Appoint a faithful steward. Let your counsellor Gríma keep all things till your return-and I pray that we may see it, though no wise man will deem it hopeful.’

Éomer laughed. ‘And if that plea does not excuse you from war, most noble Wormtongue’, he said, what office of less honour would you accept? To carry a sack of meal up into the mountains-if any man would trust you with it?’

‘Nay, Éomer, you do not fully understand the mind of Master Wormtongue’, said Gandalf, turning his piercing glance upon him. ‘He is bold and cunning. Even now he plays a game with peril and wins a throw. Hours of my precious time he has wasted already. ‘Down snake!’ he said suddenly in a terrible voice. ‘Down on your belly! How long is it since Saruman bought you? What was the promised price? When all the men were dead, you were to pick your share of the

treasure, and take the woman you desire? Too long have you watched her under your eyelids and haunted her steps.'

Éomer grasped his sword. 'That I knew already', he muttered. 'For that reason I would have slain him before, forgetting the law of the hall. But there are other reasons.' He stepped forward, but Gandalf stayed him with his hand.

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'Éowyn is safe now', he said. 'But you, Wormtongue, you have done what you could for your true master. Some reward you have earned at least. Yet Saruman is apt to overlook his bargains. I should advise you to go quickly and remind him, lest he forget your faithful service.'

'You lie', said Wormtongue.

'That word comes too oft and easy from your lips', said Gandalf. 'I do not lie. See, Théoden, here is a snake! With safety you cannot take it with you, nor can you leave it behind. To slay it would be just. But it was not always as it now is. Once it was a man, and did you service in its fashion. Give him a horse and let him go at once, wherever he chooses. By his choice you shall judge him.'

'Do you hear this, Wormtongue?' said Théoden. 'This is your choice: to ride with me to war, and let us see in battle whether you are true; or to go now, whither you will. But then, if ever we meet again, I shall not be merciful.'

Slowly Wormtongue rose. He looked at them with half-closed eyes. Last of all he scanned Théoden's face and opened his mouth as if to speak. Then suddenly he drew himself up. His hands worked. His eyes glittered. Such malice was in them that men stepped back from him. He bared his teeth; and then with a hissing breath he spat before the king's feet, and darting to one side, he fled down the stair.

'After him!' said Théoden. 'See that he does no harm to any, but do not hurt him or hinder him. Give him a horse, if he wishes it.'

‘And if any will bear him’, said Éomer.

One of the guards ran down the stair. Another went to the well at the foot of the terrace and in his helm drew water. With it he washed clean the stones that Wormtongue had defiled.

‘Now my guests, come!’ said Théoden. ‘Come and take such refreshment as haste allows.’

They passed back into the great house. Already they heard below them in the town the heralds crying and the war-horns blowing. For the king was to ride forth as soon as the men of the town and those dwelling near could be armed and assembled.

At the king’s board sat Éomer and the four guests, and there also waiting upon the king was the lady Éowyn. They ate and drank swiftly. The others were silent while Théoden questioned Gandalf concerning Saruman.

‘How far back his treachery goes, who can guess?’ said Gandalf. ‘He was not always evil. Once I do not doubt that he was the friend of Rohan; and even when his heart grew colder, he found you useful still. But for long now he has plotted your ruin, wearing the mask of Friendship, until he was 526

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ready. In those years Wormtongue’s task was easy, and all that you did was swiftly known in Isengard; for your land was open, and strangers came and went. And ever Wormtongue’s whispering was in your ears, poisoning your thought, chilling your heart, weakening your limbs, while others watched and could do nothing, for your will was in his keeping.

‘But when I escaped and warned you, then the mask was torn, for those who would see. After that Wormtongue played dangerously, always seeking to delay you, to prevent your full strength being gathered. He was crafty: dulling men’s wariness, or working on their fears, as served the occasion. Do you not remember how eagerly he urged that no man should be spared on a wildgoose chase northward, when the immediate peril was westward? He persuaded you to forbid Éomer to pursue the raiding Orcs. If Éomer had not defied Wormtongue’s

voice speaking with your mouth, those Orcs would have reached Isengard by now, bearing a great prize. Not indeed that prize which Saruman desires above all else, but at the least two members of my Company, sharers of a secret hope, of which even to you, lord, I cannot yet speak openly. Dare you think of what they might now be suffering, or what Saruman might now have learned to our destruction?’

‘I owe much to Éomer’, said Théoden. ‘Faithful heart may have forward tongue.’ ‘Say also’, said Gandalf, ‘that to crooked eyes truth may wear a wry face.’

‘Indeed my eyes were almost blind’, said Théoden. ‘Most of all I owe to you, my guest. Once again you have come in time. I would give you a gift ere we go, at your own choosing. You have only to name aught that is mine. I reserve now only my sword!’

‘Whether I came in time or not is yet to be seen’, said Gandalf. ‘But as for your gift, lord, I will choose one that will fit my need: swift and sure. Give me Shadowfax! He was only lent before, if loan we may call it. But now shall ride him into great hazard, setting silver against black: I would not risk anything that is not my own. And already there is a bond of love between us.’

‘You choose well’, said Théoden; ‘and I give him now gladly. Yet it is a great gift. There is none like to Shadowfax. In him one of the mighty steeds of old has returned. None such shall return again. And to you my other guests I will offer such things as may be found in my armoury. Swords you do not need, but there are helms and coats of mail of cunning work, gifts to my fathers out of Gondor. Choose from these ere we go, and may they serve you well!’

Now men came bearing raiment of war from the king’s hoard and they arrayed Aragorn and Legolas in shining mail. Helms too they chose, and 527

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round shields: their bosses were overlaid with gold and set with gems, green and red and white. Gandalf took no armour; and Gimli needed no coat of rings, even if one had been found to match his stature, for there was no hauberk in the hoards of Edoras of better make than his short corslet forged beneath the Mountain in the North. But he chose a cap of iron and leather that fitted well

mountain in the north. But he chose a cap of iron and leather that fitted well upon his round head; and a small shield he also took. It bore the running horse, white upon green, that was the emblem of the House of Eorl.

‘May it keep you well!’ said Théoden. ‘It was made for me in Thengel’s day, while still I was a boy.’

Gimli bowed. ‘I am proud, Lord of the Mark, to bear your device’, he said. ‘Indeed sooner would I bear a horse than be borne by one. I love my feet better. But, maybe, I shall come yet where I can stand and fight.’

‘It may well be so’, said Théoden.

The king now rose, and at once Éowyn came forward bearing wine.

‘*Ferthu Théoden hál!*’ she said. ‘Receive now this cup and drink in happy hour. Health be with thee at thy going and coming!’

Théoden drank from the cup, and she then proffered it to the guests. As she stood before Aragorn she paused suddenly and looked upon him, and her eyes were shining. And he looked down upon her fair face and smiled; but as he took the cup, his hand met hers, and he knew that she trembled at the touch. ‘Hail Aragorn son of Arathorn!’ she said. ‘Hail Lady of Rohan!’ he answered, but his face now was troubled and he did not smile.

When they had all drunk, the king went down the hall to the doors. There the guards awaited him, and heralds stood, and all the lords and chiefs were gathered together that remained in Edoras or dwelt nearby.

‘Behold! I go forth, and it seems like to be my last riding’, said Théoden. ‘I have no child. Théodred my son is slain. I name Éomer my sister-son to be my heir. If neither of us return, then choose a new lord as you will. But to some one I must now entrust my people that I leave behind, to rule them in my place. Which of you will stay?’

No man spoke.

‘Is there none whom you would name? In whom do my people trust?’

‘In the House of Eorl’, answered Háma.

‘But Eomer I cannot spare, nor would he stay’, said the king; ‘and he is the last of that House.’

‘I said not Éomer’, answered Háma. ‘And he is not the last. There is Éowyn, daughter of Éomund, his sister. She is fearless and high-hearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone.’

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‘It shall be so’, said Théoden. ‘Let the heralds announce to the folk that the Lady Éowyn will lead them!’

Then the king sat upon a seat before his doors, and Éowyn knelt before him and received from him a sword and a fair corslet. ‘Farewell sister-daughter!’ he said. ‘Dark is the hour, yet maybe we shall return to the Golden Hall. But in Dunharrow the people may long defend themselves, and if the battle go ill, thither will come all who escape.’ ‘Speak not so!’ she answered. ‘A year shall I endure for every day that passes until your return.’

But as she spoke her eyes went to Aragorn who stood nearby.

‘The king shall come again’, he said. ‘Fear not! Not West but East does our *doom* await us.’

The king now went down the stair with Gandalf beside him. The others followed. Aragorn looked back as they passed towards the gate. Alone Éowyn stood before the doors of the house at the stair’s head; the sword was set upright before her, and her hands were laid upon the hilt. She was clad now in mail and shone like silver in the sun.

Gimli walked with Legolas. his axe on his shoulder. ‘Well, at last we set off!’ he said. ‘Men need many words before deeds. My axe is restless in my hands. Though I doubt not that these Rohirrim are fell-handed when they come to it. Nonetheless this is not the warfare that suits me. How shall I come to the battle? I wish I could walk and not bump like a sack at Gandalf’s saddlebow.’

‘A safer seat than many, I guess’, said Legolas. ‘Yet doubtless Gandalf will gladly put you down on your feet when blows begin; or Shadowfax himself. An axe is no weapon for a rider.’

‘And a Dwarf is no horseman. It is orc-necks I would hew, not shave the scalps of Men’, said Gimli, patting the haft of his axe. At the gate they found a great host of men, old and young, all ready in the saddle. More than a thousand were there mustered. Their spears were like a springing wood. Loudly and joyously they shouted as Théoden came forth. Some held in readiness the king’s horse, Snowmane, and others held the horses of Aragorn and Legolas. Gimli stood ill at ease, frowning, but Éomer came up to him, leading his horse.

‘Hail, Gimli Glóin’s son!’ he cried. ‘I have not had time to learn gentle speech under your rod, as you promised. But shall we not put aside our quarrel? At least I will speak no evil again of the Lady of the Wood.’

‘I will forget my wrath for a while, Éomer son of Éomund’, said Gimli; ‘but if ever you chance to see the Lady Galadriel with your eyes, then you shall acknowledge her the fairest of ladies, or our friendship will end.’ ‘So be it!’ said Éomer. ‘But until that time pardon me, and in token of

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pardon ride with me, I beg. Gandalf will be at the head with the Lord of the Mark; but Firefoot, my horse, will bear us both, if you will.’

‘I thank you indeed’, said Gimli greatly pleased. ‘I will gladly go with you, if Legolas, my comrade, may ride beside us.’

‘It shall be so’, said Éomer. ‘Legolas upon my left, and Aragorn upon my right, and none will dare to stand before us!’

‘Where is Shadowfax?’ said Gandalf.

‘Running wild over the grass’, they answered. ‘He will let no man handle him. There he goes, away down by the ford, like a shadow among the willows.’

Gandalf whistled and called aloud the horse’s name, and far away he tossed his head and neighed, and turning sped towards the host like an arrow.

head and neighed, and turning sped towards the host like an arrow.

‘Were the breath of the West Wind to take a body visible, even so would it appear’, said Éomer, as the great horse ran up, until he stood before the wizard.

‘The gift seems already to be given’, said Théoden. ‘But hearken all!

Here now I name my guest, Gandalf Greyhame, wisest of counsellors; most welcome of wanderers, a lord of the Mark, a chieftain of the Eorlingas while our kin shall last; and I give to him Shadowfax, prince of horses.’

‘I thank you, Théoden King’, said Gandalf. Then suddenly he threw back his grey cloak, and cast aside his hat, and leaped to horseback. He wore no helm nor mail. His snowy hair flew free in the wind, his white robes shone dazzling in the sun.

‘Behold the White Rider!’ cried Aragorn, and all took up the words.

‘Our King and the White Rider!’ they shouted. ‘Forth Eorlingas!’

The trumpets sounded. The horses reared and neighed. Spear clashed on shield. Then the king raised his hand, and with a rush like the sudden onset of a great wind the last host of Rohan rode thundering into the West. Far over the plain Éowyn saw the glitter of their spears, as she stood still, alone before the doors of the silent house.

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Helm’s Deep

The sun was already westering as they rode from Edoras, and the light of it was in their eyes, turning all the rolling fields of Rohan to a golden haze. There was a beaten way, north-westward along the foot-hills of the White Mountains, and this they followed, up and down in a green country, crossing small swift streams by many fords. Far ahead and to their right the Misty Mountains loomed; ever darker and taller they grew as the miles went by. The sun went slowly down

before them. Evening came behind.

The host rode on. Need drove them. Fearing to come too late, they rode with all the speed they could, pausing seldom. Swift and enduring were the steeds of Rohan, but there were many leagues to go. Forty leagues and more it was, as a bird flies, from Edoras to the fords of the Isen, where they hoped to find the king's men that held back the hosts of Saruman. Night closed about them. At last they halted to make their camp. They had ridden for some five hours and were far out upon the western plain, yet more than half their journey lay still before them. In a great circle, under the starry sky and the waxing moon, they now made their bivouac. They lit no fires, for they were uncertain of events; but they set a ring of mounted guards about them, and scouts rode out far ahead, passing like shadows in the folds of the land. The slow night passed without tidings or alarm. At dawn the horns sounded, and within an hour they took the road again. There were no clouds overhead yet, but a heaviness was in the air; it was hot for the season of the year. The rising sun was hazy, and behind it, following it slowly up the sky, there was a growing darkness, as of a great

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storm moving out of the East. And away in the North-west there seemed to be another darkness brooding about the feet of the Misty Mountains, a shadow that crept down slowly from the Wizard's Vale.

Gandalf dropped back to where Legolas rode beside Éomer. 'You have the keen eyes of your fair kindred, Legolas', he said; 'and they can tell a sparrow from a finch a league off. Tell me, can you see anything away yonder towards Isengard?'

'Many miles lie between', said Legolas, gazing thither and shading his eyes with his long hand. 'I can see a darkness. There are shapes moving in it, great shapes far away upon the bank of the river; but what they are I cannot tell. It is not mist or cloud that defeats my eyes: there is a veiling shadow that some power lays upon the land, and it marches slowly down stream. It is as if the twilight under endless trees were flowing downwards from the hills.'

'And behind us comes a very storm of Mordor', said Gandalf. 'It will be a black night.'

As the second day of their riding drew on, the heaviness in the air increased. In the afternoon the dark clouds began to overtake them: a sombre canopy with great billowing edges flecked with dazzling light. The sun went down, blood-red in a smoking haze. The spears of the Riders were tipped with fire as the last shafts of light kindled the steep faces of the peaks of Thrihyrne: now very near they stood on the northernmost arm of the White Mountains, three jagged horns staring at the sunset. In the last red glow men in the vanguard saw a black speck, a horseman riding back towards them. They halted awaiting him.

He came, a weary man with dented helm and cloven shield. Slowly he climbed from his horse and stood there a while gasping. At length he spoke. 'Is Éomer here?' he asked. 'You come at last, but too late, and with too little strength. Things have gone evilly since Théodred fell. We were driven back yesterday over the Isen with great loss; many perished at the crossing. Then at night fresh forces came over the river against our camp. All Isengard must be emptied; and Saruman has armed the wild hillmen and herd-folk of Dunland beyond the rivers, and these also he loosed upon us. We were overmastered. The shieldwall was broken. Erkenbrand of Westfold has drawn off those men he could gather towards his fastness in Helm's Deep. The rest are scattered.

'Where is Éomer? Tell him there is no hope ahead. He should return to Edoras before the wolves of Isengard come there.' Théoden had sat silent, hidden from the man's sight behind his guards; now he urged his

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horse forward. 'Come, stand before me, Ceorl!' he said. 'I am here. The last host of the Eorlingas has ridden forth. It will not return without battle.'

The man's face lightened with joy and wonder. He drew himself up. Then he knelt, offering his notched sword to the king. 'Command me, lord!' he cried. 'And pardon me! I thought...'

'You thought I remained in Meduseld bent like an old tree under winter snow. So it was when you rode to war. But a west wind has shaken the boughs', said Théoden. 'Give this man a fresh horse! Let us ride to the help of Erkenbrand!'

While Théoden was speaking, Gandalf rode a short way ahead, and he sat there alone, gazing north to Isengard and west to the setting sun. Now he came back.

‘Ride, Théoden!’ he said. ‘Ride to Helm’s Deep! Go not to the Fords of Isen, and do not tarry in the plain! I must leave you for a while. Shadowfax must bear me now on a swift errand.’ Turning to Aragorn and Éomer and the men of the king’s household, he cried: ‘Keep well the Lord of the Mark, till I return. Await me at Helm’s Gate! Farewell!’

He spoke a word to Shadowfax, and like an arrow from the bow the great horse sprang away. Even as they looked he was gone: a flash of silver in the sunset, a wind over the grass, a shadow that fled and passed from sight. Snowmane snorted and reared, eager to follow; but only a swift bird on the wing could have overtaken him.

‘What does that mean?’ said one of the guard to Háma.

‘That Gandalf Greyhame has need of haste’, answered Háma. ‘Ever he goes and comes unlooked-for:’

‘Wormtongue, were he here, would not find it hard to explain’ Said the other.

‘True enough’, said Háma; ‘but for myself, I will wait until I see Gandalf again.’

‘Maybe you will wait long’, said the other.

The host turned away now from the road to the Fords of Isen and bent their course southward. Night fell, and still they rode on. The hills drew near, but the tall peaks of Thrihyrne were already dim against the darkening sky. Still some miles away, on the far side of the Westfold Vale, lay a green coomb, a great bay in the mountains, out of which a gorge opened in the hills. Men of that land called it Helm’s Deep, after a hero of old wars who had made his refuge there. Ever steeper and narrower it wound inward from the north under the shadow of the Thrihyrne, till the crow-haunted cliffs rose like mighty towers on either side, shutting out the light.

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At Helm's Gate, before the mouth of the Deep, there was a heel of rock thrust outward by the northern cliff. There upon its spur stood high walls of ancient stone, and within them was a lofty tower. Men said that in the far-off days of the glory of Gondor the sea-kings had built here this fastness with the hands of giants. The Hornburg it was called, for a trumpet sounded upon the tower echoed in the Deep behind, as if armies longforgotten were issuing to war from caves beneath the hills. A wall, too, the men of old had made from the Hornburg to the southern cliff, barring the entrance to the gorge. Beneath it by a wide culvert the Deeping-stream passed out. About the feet of the Hornrock it wound, and flowed then in a gully through the midst of a wide green gore, sloping gently down from Helm's Gate to Helm's Dike. Thence it fell into the Deeping-coomb and out into the Westfold Vale. There in the Hornburg at Helm's Gate Erkenbrand, master of Westfold on the borders of the Mark, now dwelt. As the days darkened with threat of war, being wise, he had repaired the wall and made the fastness strong.

The Riders were still in the low valley before the mouth of the Coomb, when cries and hornblasts were heard from their scouts that went in front. Out of the darkness arrows whistled. Swiftly a scout rode back and reported that wolf-riders were abroad in the valley, and that a host of Orcs and wild men were hurrying southward from the Fords of Isen and seemed to be making for Helm's Deep.

'We have found many of our folk lying slain as they fled thither', said the scout. 'And we have met scattered companies, going this way and that, leaderless. What has become of Erkenbrand none seem to know. It is likely that he will be overtaken ere he can reach Helm's Gate, if he has not already perished.'

'Has aught been seen of Gandalf?' asked Théoden.

'Yes, lord. Many have seen an old man in white upon a horse, passing hither and thither over the plains like wind in the grass. Some thought he was Saruman. It is said that he went away ere nightfall towards Isengard. Some say also that Wormtongue was seen earlier, going northward with a company of Orcs.'

'It will go ill with Wormtongue, if Gandalf comes upon him said Théoden. 'Nonetheless I miss now both my counsellors, the old and the new. But in this need we have no better choice than to go on, as Gandalf said, to Helm's Gate, whether Erkenbrand be there or no. Is it known how great is the host that comes from the North?'

‘It is very great’, said the scout. ‘He that flies counts every foeman twice, yet I have spoken to stouthearted men, and I do not doubt that the 534

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main strength of the enemy is many times as great as all that we have here.’

‘Then let us be swift’, said Éomer. ‘Let us drive through such foes as are already between us and the fastness. There are caves in Helm’s Deep where hundreds may lie hid; and secret ways lead thence up on to the hills.

‘Trust not to secret ways’, said the king. ‘Saruman has long spied out this land. Still in that place our defence may last long. Let us go!’

Aragorn and Legolas went now with Éomer in the van. On through the dark night they rode, ever slower as the darkness deepened and their way climbed southward, higher and higher into the dim folds about the mountains’ feet. They found few of the enemy before them. Here and there they came upon roving bands of Orcs; but they fled ere the Riders could take or slay them.

‘It will not be long I fear’, said Éomer, ‘ere the coming of the king’s host will be known to the leader of our enemies, Saruman or whatever captain he has sent forth.’

The rumour of war grew behind them. Now they could hear, borne over the dark, the sound of harsh singing. They had climbed far up into the Deeping-coomb when they looked back. Then they saw torches countless points of fiery light upon the black fields behind, scattered like red flowers, or winding up from the lowlands in long flickering lines. Here and there a larger blaze leapt up.

‘It is a great host and follows us hard’, said Aragorn.

‘They bring fire’, said Théoden, ‘and they are burning as they come, rick, cot, and tree. This was a rich vale and had many homesteads. Alas for my folk!’

‘Would that day was here and we might ride down upon them like a storm out of the mountains!’ said Aragorn. ‘It grieves me to fly before them.’

‘We need not fly much further’, said Éomer. ‘Not far ahead now lies Helm’s Dike, an ancient trench and rampart scored across the coomb, two furlongs below Helm’s Gate. There we can turn and give battle.’

‘Nay, we are too few to defend the Dike’, said Théoden. ‘It is a mile long or more, and the breach in it is wide.’

‘At the breach our rearguard must stand, if we are pressed’, said Éomer.

There was neither star nor moon when the Riders came to the breach in the Dike, where the stream from above passed out, and the road beside it ran down from the Hornburg. The rampart loomed suddenly before

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them, a high shadow beyond a dark pit. As they rode up a sentinel challenged them.

‘The Lord of the Mark rides to Helm’s Gate’, Éomer answered. ‘I, Éomer son of Éomund, speak.’

‘This is good tidings beyond hope’, said the sentinel. ‘Hasten! The enemy is on your heels.’

The host passed through the breach and halted on the sloping sward above. They now learned to their joy that Erkenbrand had left many men to hold Helm’s Gate, and more had since escaped thither.

‘Maybe, we have a thousand fit to fight on foot’, said Gamling, an old man, the leader of those that watched the Dike. ‘But most of them have seen too many winters, as I have, or too few, as my son’s son here. What news of Erkenbrand? Word came yesterday that he was retreating hither with all that is left of the best Riders of Westfold. But he has not come.’

‘I fear that he will not come now’, said Éomer. ‘Our scouts have gained no news of him, and the enemy fills all the valley behind us.’

‘I would that he had escaped’, said Théoden. ‘He was a mighty man. In him lived again the valour of Helm the Hammerhand. But we cannot await him here

lived again the value of Helm the Hammerhand. But we cannot await him here. We must draw all our forces now behind the walls. Are you well stored? We bring little provision, for we rode forth to open battle, not to a siege.'

'Behind us in the caves of the Deep are three parts of the folk of Westfold, old and young, children and women', said Gamling. 'But great store of food, and many beasts and their fodder, have also been gathered there.'

'That is well', said Éomer. 'They are burning or despoiling all that is left in the vale.'

'If they come to bargain for our goods at Helm's Gate, they will pay a high price', said Gamling.

The king and his Riders passed on. Before the causeway that crossed the stream they dismounted. In a long file they led their horses up the ramp and passed within the gates of the Hornburg. There they were welcomed again with joy and renewed hope; for now there were men enough to man both the burg and the barrier wall.

Quickly Éomer set his men in readiness. The king and the men of his household were in the Hornburg, and there also were many of the Westfold-men. But on the Deeping Wall and its tower, and behind it, Éomer arrayed most of the strength that he had, for here the defence seemed more doubtful, if the assault were determined and in great force. The horses were led far up the Deep under such guard as could be spared. 536

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The Deeping Wall was twenty feet high, and so thick that four men could walk abreast along the top, sheltered by a parapet over which only a tall man could look. Here and there were clefts in the stone through which men could shoot. This battlement could be reached by a stair running down from a door in the outer court of the Hornburg; three flights of steps led also up on to the wall from the Deep behind; but in front it was smooth, and the great stones of it were set with such skill that no foothold could be found at their joints, and at the top they hung over like a seadelved cliff. Gimli stood leaning against the breastwork upon the wall. Legolas sat above on the parapet, fingering his bow, and peering out into the gloom.

‘This is more to my liking’, said the dwarf, stamping on the stones.

‘Ever my heart rises as we draw near the mountains. There is good rock here. This country has tough bones. I felt them in my feet as we came up from the dike. Give me a year and a hundred of my kin and I would make this a place that armies would break upon like water.’

‘I do not doubt it’, said Legolas. ‘But you are a dwarf, and dwarves are strange folk. I do not like this place, and I shall like it no more by the light of day. But you comfort me, Gimli, and I am glad to have you standing nigh with your stout legs and your hard axe. I wish there were more of your kin among us. But even more would I give for a hundred good archers of Mirkwood. We shall need them. The Rohirrim have good bowmen after their fashion, but there are too few here, too few.’

‘It is dark for archery’, said Gimli. ‘Indeed it is time for sleep. Sleep! I feel the need of it, as never I thought any dwarf could. Riding is tiring work. Yet my axe is restless in my hand. Give me a row of orc-necks and room to swing and all weariness will fall from me!’

A slow time passed. Far down in the valley scattered fires still burned. The hosts of Isengard were advancing in silence now. Their torches could be seen winding up the coomb in many lines.

Suddenly from the Dike yells and screams, and the fierce battle-cries of men broke out. Flaming brands appeared over the brink and clustered thickly at the breach. Then they scattered and vanished. Men came galloping back over the field and up the ramp to the gate of the Hornburg. The rearguard of the Westfolders had been driven in.

‘The enemy is at hand!’ they said. ‘We loosed every arrow that we had, and filled the Dike with Orcs. But it will not halt them long. Already they are scaling the bank at many points, thick as marching ants. But we have taught them not to carry torches.’

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It was now past midnight. The sky was utterly dark, and the stillness of the heavy air foreboded storm. Suddenly the clouds were seared by a blinding flash. Branched lightning smote down upon the eastward hills. For a staring moment the watchers on the walls saw all the space between them and the Dike lit with white light: it was boiling and crawling with black shapes, some squat and broad, some tall and grim, with high helms and sable shields. Hundreds and hundreds more were pouring over the Dike and through the breach. The dark tide flowed up to the walls from cliff to cliff. Thunder rolled in the valley. Rain came lashing down. Arrows thick as the rain came whistling over the battlements, and fell clinking and glancing on the stones. Some found a mark. The assault on Helm's Deep had begun, but no sound or challenge was heard within; no answering arrows came.

The assailing hosts halted, foiled by the silent menace of rock and wall. Ever and again the lightning tore aside the darkness. Then the Orcs screamed, waving spear and sword, and shooting a cloud of arrows at any that stood revealed upon the battlements; and the men of the Mark amazed looked out, as it seemed to them, upon a great field of dark corn, tossed by a tempest of war, and every ear glinted with barbed light. Brazen trumpets sounded. The enemy surged forward, some against the Deeping Wall, other towards the causeway and the ramp that led up to the Hornburg-gates. There the hugest Orcs were mustered, and the wild men of the Dunland fells. A moment they hesitated and then on they came. The lightning flashed, and blazoned upon every helm and shield the ghastly hand of Isengard was seen: They reached the summit of the rock; they drove towards the gates.

Then at last an answer came: a storm of arrows met them, and a hail of stones. They wavered, broke, and fled back; and then charged again, broke and charged again; and each time, like the incoming sea, they halted at a higher point. Again trumpets rang, and a press of roaring men leaped forth. They held their great shields above them like a roof, while in their midst they bore two trunks of mighty trees. Behind them orc-archers crowded, sending a hail of darts against the bowmen on the walls. They gained the gates. The trees, swung by strong arms, smote the timbers with a rending boom. If any man fell, crushed by a stone hurtling from above, two others sprang to take his place. Again and again the great rams swung and crashed.

Éomer and Aragorn stood together on the Deeping Wall. They heard the roar of

Éomer and Aragorn stood together on the Deeping Wall. They heard the roar of voices and the thudding of the rams; and then in a sudden flash of light they beheld the peril of the gates.

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‘Come!’ said Aragorn. ‘This is the hour when we draw swords together!’

Running like fire, they sped along the wall, and up the steps, and passed into the outer court upon the Rock. As they ran they gathered a handful of stout swordsmen. There was a small postern-door that opened in an angle of the burg-wall on the west, where the cliff stretched out to meet it. On that side a narrow path ran round towards the great gate, between the wall and the sheer brink of the Rock. Together Éomer and Aragorn sprang through the door, their men close behind. The swords flashed from the sheath as one.

‘Gúthwinë!’ cried Éomer. ‘Gúthwinë for the Mark!’

‘Andúril!’ cried Aragorn. ‘Andúril for the Dúnedain!’

Charging from the side, they hurled themselves upon the wild men. Andúril rose and fell, gleaming with white fire. A shout went up from wall and tower: ‘Andúril! Andúril goes to war. The Blade that was Broken shines again!’

Dismayed the rammers let fall the trees and turned to fight; but the wall of their shields was broken as by a lightning-stroke, and they were swept away, hewn down, or cast over the Rock into the stony stream below. The orc-archers shot wildly and then fled.

For a moment Éomer and Aragorn halted before the gates. The thunder was rumbling in the distance now. The lightning flickered still, far off among the mountains in the South. A keen wind was blowing from the North again. The clouds were torn and drifting, and stars peeped out; and above the hills of the Coomb-side the westering moon rode, glimmering yellow in the storm-wrack.

‘We did not come too soon’, said Aragorn, looking at the gates. Their great hinges and iron bars were wrenched and bent; many of their timbers were

timbers and iron bars were wrenched and bent, many of the timbers were cracked.

‘Yet we cannot stay here beyond the walls to defend them’, said Éomer. ‘Look!’ He pointed to the causeway. Already a great press of Orcs and Men were gathering again beyond the stream. Arrows whined, and skipped on the stones about them. ‘Come! We must get back and see what we can do to pile stone and beam across the gates within. Come now!’

They turned and ran. At that moment some dozen Orcs that had lain motionless among the slain leaped to their feet, and came silently and swiftly behind. Two flung themselves to the ground at Éomer’s heels, tripped him, and in a moment they were on top of him. But a small dark figure that none had observed sprang out of the shadows and gave a hoarse

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shout: *Baruk Khazâd! Khazâd ai-mênu!* An axe swung and swept back. Two Orcs fell headless. The rest fled.

Éomer struggled to his feet, even as Aragorn ran back to his aid. The postern was closed again, the iron door was barred and piled inside with stones. When all were safe within, Éomer turned: ‘I thank you, Gimli son of Glóin!’ he said. ‘I did not know that you were with us in the sortie. But oft the unbidden guest proves the best company. How came you there?’

‘I followed you to shake off sleep’, said Gimli; ‘but I looked on the hillmen and they seemed over large for me, so I sat beside a stone to see your sword-play.’

‘I shall not find it easy to repay you’, said Éomer.

‘There may be many a chance ere the night is over’, laughed the Dwarf.

‘But I am content. Till now I have hewn naught but wood since I left Moria.’

‘Two!’ said Gimli, patting his axe. He had returned to his place on the wall.

‘Two?’ said Legolas. ‘I have done better, though now I must grope for spent arrows; all mine are gone. Yet I make my tale twenty at the least. But that is only

a few leaves in a forest.'

The sky now was quickly clearing and the sinking moon was shining brightly. But the light brought little hope to the Riders of the Mark. The enemy before them seemed to have grown rather than diminished, still more were pressing up from the valley through the breach. The sortie upon the Rock gained only a brief respite. The assault on the gates was redoubled. Against the Deeping Wall the hosts of Isengard roared like a sea. Orcs and hillmen swarmed about its feet from end to end. Ropes with grappling hooks were hurled over the parapet faster than men could cut them or fling them back. Hundreds of long ladders were lifted up. Many were cast down in ruin, but many more replaced them, and Orcs sprang up them like apes in the dark forests of the South. Before the wall's foot the dead and broken were piled like shingle in a storm; ever higher rose the hideous mounds, and still the enemy came on.

The men of Rohan grew weary. All their arrows were spent, and every shaft was shot; their swords were notched, and their shields were riven. Three times Aragorn and Éomer rallied them, and three times Andúril flamed in a desperate charge that drove the enemy from the wall. Then a clamour arose in the Deep behind. Orcs had crept like rats through the culvert through which the stream flowed out. There they had 540

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gathered in the shadow of the cliffs, until the assault above was hottest and nearly all the men of the defence had rushed to the wall's top. Then they sprang out. Already some had passed into the jaws of the Deep and were among the horses, fighting with the guards.

Down from the wall leapt Gimli with a fierce cry that echoed in the cliffs. 'Khazâd! Khazâd!' He soon had work enough.

'Ai-oi!' he shouted. 'The Orcs are behind the wall. Ai-oi! Come, Legolas! There are enough for us both. *Khazâd ai-mênu!*'

Gamling the Old looked down from the Hornburg, hearing the great voice of the dwarf above all the tumult. 'The Orcs are in the Deep!' he cried. 'Helm! Helm! Forth Helmingas. he shouted as he leaped down the stair from the Rock with

many men of Westfold at his back. Their onset was fierce and sudden, and the Orcs gave way before them. Ere long they were hemmed in in the narrows of the gorge, and all were slain or driven shrieking into the chasm of the Deep to fall before the guardians of the hidden caves.

‘Twenty-one!’ cried Gimli. He hewed a two-handed stroke and laid the last Orc before his feet. ‘Now my count passes Master Legolas again.’

‘We must stop this rat-hole’, said Gamling. ‘Dwarves are said to be cunning folk with stone. Lend us your aid, master!’

‘We do not shape stone with battle-axes, nor with our finger-nails’, said Gimli. ‘But I will help as I may.’

They gathered such small boulders and broken stones as they could find to hand, and under Gimli’s direction the Westfold-men blocked up the inner end of the culvert, until only a narrow outlet remained. Then the Deeping-stream, swollen by the rain, churned and fretted in its choked path, and spread slowly in cold pools from cliff to cliff.

‘It will be drier above’, said Gimli. ‘Come, Gamling, let us see how things go on the wall!’

He climbed up and found Legolas beside Aragorn and Éomer. The elf was whetting his long knife. There was for a while a lull in the assault, since the attempt to break in through the culvert had been foiled.

‘Twenty-one!’ said Gimli.

‘Good!’ said Legolas. ‘But my count is now two dozen. It has been knife-work up here.’

Éomer and Aragorn leant wearily on their swords. Away on the left the crash and clamour of the battle on the Rock rose loud again. But the Hornburg still held fast, like an island in the sea. Its gates lay in ruin; but over the barricade of beams and stones within no enemy as yet had passed. 541

Aragorn looked at the pale stars, and at the moon, now sloping behind the western hills that enclosed the valley. 'This is a night as long as years', he said. 'How long will the day tarry?'

'Dawn is not far off', said Gamling, who had now climbed up beside him. 'But dawn will not help us, I fear.'

'Yet dawn is ever the hope of men', said Aragorn.

'But these creatures of Isengard, these half-orcs and goblin-men that the foul craft of Saruman has bred, they will not quail at the sun', said Gamling.

'And neither will the wild men of the hills. Do you not hear their voices?'

'I hear them', said Éomer; 'but they are only the scream of birds and the bellowing of beasts to my ears.'

'Yet there are many that cry in the Dunland tongue', said Gamling. 'I know that tongue. It is an ancient speech of men, and once was spoken in many western valleys of the Mark. Hark! They hate us, and they are glad; for our *doom* seems certain to them. 'The king the king!' they cry. 'We will take their king. Death to the Forgoil! Death to the Strawheads! Death to the robbers of the North!' Such names they have for us. Not in half a thousand years have they forgotten their grievance that the lords of Gondor gave the Mark to Eorl the Young and made alliance with him. That old hatred Saruman has inflamed. They are fierce folk when roused. They will not give way now for dusk or dawn, until Théoden is taken, or they themselves are slain.'

'Nonetheless day will bring hope to me', said Aragorn. 'Is it not said that no foe has ever taken the Hornburg, if men defended it?'

'So the minstrels say', said Éomer.

'Then let us defend it, and hope!' said Aragorn.

Even as they spoke there came a blare of trumpets. Then there was a crash and a flash of flame and smoke. The waters of the Deeping-stream poured out hissing and foaming: they were choked no longer, a gaping hole was blasted in the wall. A host of dark shapes poured in.

‘Devilry of Saruman!’ cried Aragorn. ‘They have crept in the culvert again, while we talked, and they have lit the fire of Orthanc beneath our feet. *Elendil, Elendil!*’ he shouted, as he leaped down into the breach; but even as he did so a hundred ladders were raised against the battlements. Over the wall and under the wall the last assault came sweeping like a dark wave upon a hill of sand. The defence was swept away. Some of the Riders were driven back, further and further into the Deep, falling and fighting as they gave way, step by step, towards the caves. Others cut their way back towards the citadel.

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A broad stairway, climbed from the Deep up to the Rock and the reargate of the Hornburg. Near the bottom stood Aragorn. In his hand still Andúril gleamed, and the terror of the sword for a while held back the enemy, as one by one all who could gain the stair passed up towards the gate. Behind on the upper steps knelt Legolas. His bow was bent, but one gleaned arrow was all that he had left, and he peered out now, ready to shoot the first Orc that should dare to approach the stair.

‘All who can have now got safe within, Aragorn’, he called. ‘Come back!’

Aragorn turned and sped up the stair; but as he ran he stumbled in his weariness. At once his enemies leapt forward. Up came the Orcs, yelling, with their long arms stretched out to seize him. The foremost fell with Legolas’ last arrow in his throat. but the rest sprang over him. Then a great boulder, cast from the outer wall above, crashed down upon the stair, and hurled them back into the Deep. Aragorn gained the door, and swiftly it clanged to behind him.

‘Things go ill, my friends’, he said, wiping the sweat from his brow with his arm.

‘Ill enough’, said Legolas, ‘but not yet hopeless, while we have you with us. Where is Gimli?’

‘I do not know.’ said Aragorn. ‘I last saw him fighting on the ground behind the wall, but the enemy swept us apart.’

wall, but the enemy swept us apart.

‘Alas! That is evil news’, said Legolas.

‘He is stout and strong’, said Aragorn. ‘Let us hope that he will escape back to the caves. There he would be safe for a while. Safer than we. Such a refuge would be to the liking of a dwarf.’

‘That must be my hope’ said Legolas. ‘But I wish that he had come this way. I desired to tell Master Gimli that my tale is now thirty-nine.’

‘If he wins back to the caves, he will pass your count again’, laughed Aragorn. ‘Never did I see an axe so wielded.’

‘I must go and seek some arrows’, said Legolas. ‘Would that this night would end, and I could have better light for shooting.’

Aragorn now passed into the citadel. There to his dismay he learned that Éomer had not reached the Hornburg.

‘Nay, he did not come to the Rock’, said one of the Westfold-men, ‘I last saw him gathering men about him and fighting in the mouth of the Deep. Gamling was with him, and the dwarf; but I could not come to them.’

Aragorn strode on through the inner court, and mounted to a high chamber in the tower. There stood the king, dark against a narrow window, looking out upon the vale.

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‘What is the news, Aragorn?’ he said.

‘The Deeping Wall is taken, lord, and all the defence swept away; but many have escaped hither to the Rock.’

‘Is Éomer here?’

‘No, lord. But many of your men retreated into the Deep; and some say that Éomer was amongst them. In the narrows they may hold back the enemy and come within the caves. What hope they may have then I do not know.’

‘More than we. Good provision, it is said. And the air is wholesome there because of the outlets through fissures in the rock far above. None can force an entrance against determined men. They may hold out long.’

‘But the Orcs have brought a devilry from Orthanc’, said Aragorn.

‘They have a blasting fire, and with it they took the Wall. If they cannot come in the caves, they may seal up those that are inside. But now we must turn all our thoughts to our own defence.’

‘I fret in this prison’, said Théoden. ‘If I could have set a spear in rest, riding before my men upon the field, maybe I could have felt again the joy of battle, and so ended. But I serve little purpose here.’

‘Here at least you are guarded in the strongest fastness of the Mark’, said Aragorn. ‘More hope we have to defend you in the Hornburg than in Edoras, or even at Dunharrow in the mountains.’

‘It is said that the Hornburg has never fallen to assault’, said Théoden;

‘but now my heart is doubtful. The world changes, and all that once was strong now proves unsure. How shall any tower withstand such numbers and such reckless hate? Had I known that the strength of Isengard was grown so great, maybe I should not so rashly have ridden forth to meet it, for all the arts of Gandalf. His counsel seems not now so good as it did under the morning sun.’

‘Do not judge the counsel of Gandalf, until all is over, lord’, said Aragorn.

‘The end will not be long’, said the king. ‘But I will not end here, taken like an old badger in a trap. Snowmane and Hasufel and the horses of my guard are in the inner court. When dawn comes, I will bid men sound Helm’s horn, and I will ride forth. Will you ride with me then, son of Arathorn? Maybe we shall cleave a road, or make such an end as will be worth a song-if any be left to sing of us hereafter.’

‘I will ride with you’, said Aragorn.

Taking his leave, he returned to the walls, and passed round all their circuit, enheartening the men, and lending aid wherever the assault was hot. Legolas went with him. Blasts of fire leaped up from below shaking the stones. Grappling-hooks were hurled, and ladders raised. Again and again 544

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the Orcs gained the summit of the outer wall, and again the defenders cast them down.

At last Aragorn stood above the great gates, heedless of the darts of the enemy. As he looked forth he saw the eastern sky grow pale. Then he raised his empty hand, palm outward in token of parley. The Orcs yelled and jeered. 'Come down! Come down!' they cried. 'If you wish to speak to us, come down! Bring out your king! We are the fighting Urukhai. We will fetch him from his hole, if he does not come. Bring out your skulking king!'

'The king stays or comes at his own will', said Aragorn.

'Then what are you doing here?' they answered. 'Why do you look out?

Do you wish to see the greatness of our army? We are the fighting Urukhai.'

'I looked out to see the dawn', said Aragorn.

'What of the dawn?' they jeered. 'We are the Urukhai: we do not stop the fight for night or day, for fair weather or for storm. We come to kill, by sun or moon. What of the dawn?'

'None knows what the new day shall bring him', said Aragorn. 'Get you gone, ere it turn to your evil.'

'Get down or we will shoot you from the wall', they cried. 'This is no parley. You have nothing to say.'

'I have still this to say', answered Aragorn. 'No enemy has yet taken the Hornburg. Depart, or not one of you will be spared. Not one will be left alive to take back tidings to the North. You do not know your peril.'

So great a power and royalty was revealed in Aragorn, as he stood there alone above the ruined gates before the host of his enemies, that many of the wild men paused, and looked back over their shoulders to the valley, and some looked up doubtfully at the sky. But the Orcs laughed with loud voices; and a hail of darts and arrows whistled over the wall, as Aragorn leaped down.

There was a roar and a blast of fire. The archway of the gate above which he had stood a moment before crumbled and crashed in smoke and dust. The barricade was scattered as if by a thunderbolt. Aragorn ran to the king's tower.

But even as the gate fell, and the Orcs about it yelled, preparing to charge, a murmur arose behind them. like a wind in the distance, and it grew to a clamour of many voices crying strange news in the dawn. The Orcs upon the Rock, hearing the rumour of dismay, wavered and looked back. And then, sudden and terrible, from the tower above, the sound of the great horn of Helm rang out.

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All that heard that sound trembled. Many of the Orcs cast themselves on their faces and covered their ears with their claws. Back from the Deep the echoes came, blast upon blast, as if on every cliff and hill a mighty herald stood. But on the walls men looked up, listening with wonder; for the echoes did not die. Ever the hornblasts wound on among the hills; nearer now and louder they answered one to another, blowing fierce and free.

‘Helm! Helm!’ the Riders shouted. ‘Helm is arisen and comes back to war. Helm for Théoden King!’

And with that shout the king came. His horse was white as snow, golden was his shield, and his spear was long. At his right hand was Aragorn, Elendil's heir, behind him rode the lords of the House of Eorl the Young. Light sprang in the sky. Night departed.

‘Forth Eorlingas!’ With a cry and a great noise they charged. Down from the gates they roared, over the causeway they swept, and they drove through the hosts of Isengard as a wind among grass. Behind them from the Deep came the

hosts of Isengard as a wind among grass. Behind them from the Deep came the stern cries of 'men issuing from the caves, driving forth the enemy. Out poured all the men that were left upon the Rock. And ever the sound of blowing horns echoed in the hills.

On they rode, the king and his companions. Captains and champions fell or fled before them. Neither orc nor man withstood them. Their backs were to the swords and spears of the Riders and their faces to the valley. They cried and wailed, for fear and great wonder had come upon them with the rising of the day.

So King Théoden rode from Helm's Gate and clove his path to the great Dike. There the company halted. Light grew bright about them. Shafts of the sun flared above the eastern hills and glimmered on their spears. But they sat silent on their horses, and they gazed down upon the Deeping-coomb.

The land had changed. Where before the green dale had lain, its grassy slopes lapping the ever-mounting hills, there now a forest loomed. Great trees, bare and silent, stood, rank on rank, with tangled bough and hoary head; their twisted roots were buried in the long green grass. Darkness was under them. Between the Dike and the eaves of that nameless wood only two open furlongs lay. There now cowered the proud hosts of Saruman, in terror of the king and in terror of the trees. They streamed down from Helm's Gate until all above the Dike was empty of them, but below it they were packed like swarming flies. Vainly they crawled and clambered about the walls of the coomb. seeking to escape. Upon the east too sheer and stony was the valley's side; upon the left, from the west, their final *doom* approached.

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There suddenly upon a ridge appeared a rider, clad in white, shining in the rising sun. Over the low hills the horns were sounding. Behind him, hastening down the long slopes, were a thousand men on foot; their swords were in their hands. Amid them strode a man tall and strong. His shield was red. As he came to the valley's brink, he set to his lips a great black horn and blew a ringing blast.

'Erkenbrand!' the Riders shouted. 'Erkenbrand!'

‘Behold the White Rider!’ cried Aragorn. ‘Gandalf is come again!’

‘Mithrandir, Mithrandir!’ said Legolas. ‘This is wizardry indeed! Come!

I would look on this forest, ere the spell changes.’

The hosts of Isengard roared, swaying this way and that, turning from fear to fear. Again the horn sounded from the tower. Down through the breach of the Dike charged the king’s company. Down from the hills leaped Erkenbrand, lord of Westfold. Down leaped Shadowfax, like a deer that runs surefooted in the mountains. The White Rider was upon them, and the terror of his coming filled the enemy with madness. The wild men fell on their faces before him. The Orcs reeled and screamed and cast aside both sword and spear. Like a black smoke driven by a mounting wind they fled. Wailing they passed under the waiting shadow of the trees; and from that shadow none ever came again.

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The Road to Isengard

So it was that in the light of a fair morning King Théoden and Gandalf the White Rider met again upon the green grass beside the Deeping-stream. There was also Aragorn son of Arathorn, and Legolas the Elf, and Erkenbrand of Westfold, and the lords of the Golden House. About them were gathered the Rohirrim, the Riders of the Mark: wonder overcame their joy in victory, and their eyes were turned towards the wood.

Suddenly there was a great shout, and down from the Dike came those who had been driven back into the Deep. There came Gamling the Old, and Éomer son of Éomund, and beside them walked Gimli the dwarf. He had no helm, and about his head was a linen band stained with blood; but his voice was loud and strong.

‘Forty-two, Master Legolas!’ he cried. ‘Alas! My axe is notched: the forty-second had an iron collar on his neck. How is it with you?’

‘You have passed my score by one’, answered Legolas. ‘But I do not grudge you the game, so glad am I to see you on your legs!’

‘Welcome, Éomer, sister-son!’ said Théoden. ‘Now that I see you safe, I am glad indeed.’

‘Hail, Lord of the Mark!’ said Éomer. ‘The dark night has passed and day has come again. But the day has brought strange tidings.’ He turned and gazed in wonder, first at the wood and then at Gandalf. ‘Once more you come in the hour of need, unlooked-for’, he said.

‘Unlooked-for?’ said Gandalf. ‘I said that I would return and meet you here.’

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‘But you did not name the hour, nor foretell the manner of your coming. Strange help you bring. You are mighty in wizardry, Gandalf the White!’

‘That may be. But if so, I have not shown it yet. I have but given good counsel in peril, and made use of the speed of Shadowfax. Your own valour has done more, and the stout legs of the Westfold-men marching through the night.’

Then they all gazed at Gandalf with still greater wonder. Some glanced darkly at the wood, and passed their hands over their brows, as if they thought their eyes saw otherwise than his.

Gandalf laughed long and merrily. ‘The trees?’ he said. ‘Nay, I see the wood as plainly as do you. But that is no deed of mine. It is a thing beyond the counsel of the wise. Better than my design, and better even than my hope the event has proved.’

‘Then if not yours, whose is the wizardry?’ said Théoden. ‘Not Saruman’s, that is plain. Is there some mightier sage, of whom we have yet to learn?’

‘It is not wizardry, but a power far older’, said Gandalf: ‘a power that walked the earth, ere elf sang or hammer rang.’

*Ere iron was found or tree was hewn,
When young was mountain under moon;
Ere ring was made, or wrought was woe,
It walked the forests long ago.'*

'And what may be the answer to your riddle?' said Théoden.

'If you would learn that, you should come with me to Isengard '

answered Gandalf.

'To Isengard?' they cried.

'Yes', said Gandalf. 'I shall return to Isengard, and those who will may come with me. There we may see strange things.'

'But there are not men enough in the Mark, not if they were all gathered together and healed of wounds and weariness, to assault the stronghold of Saruman', said Théoden.

'Nevertheless to Isengard I go', said Gandalf. 'I shall not stay there long. My way lies now eastward. Look for me in Edoras, ere the waning of the moon!'

'Nay!' said Théoden. 'In the dark hour before dawn I doubted, but we will not part now. I will come with you, if that is your counsel.'

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'I wish to speak with Saruman, as soon as may be now', said Gandalf,

'and since he has done you great injury, it would be fitting if you were there. But how soon and how swiftly will you ride?'

‘My men are weary with battle’, said the King; ‘and I am weary also. For I have ridden far and slept little. Alas! My old age is not feigned nor due only to the whisperings of Wormtongue. It is an ill that no leech can wholly cure, not even Gandalf.’

‘Then let all who are to ride with me rest now’, said Gandalf. ‘We will journey under the shadow of evening. It is as well; for it is my counsel that all our comings and goings should be as secret as may be, henceforth. But do not command many men to go with you, Théoden. We go to a parley not to a fight.’

The King then chose men that were unhurt and had swift horses, and he sent them forth with tidings of the victory into every vale of the Mark; and they bore his summons also, bidding all men, young and old, to come in haste to Edoras. There the Lord of the Mark would hold an assembly of all that could bear arms, on the second day after the full moon. To ride with him to Isengard the King chose Éomer and twenty men of his household. With Gandalf would go Aragorn, and Legolas, and Gimli. In spite of his hurt the dwarf would not stay behind.

‘It was only a feeble blow and the cap turned it;’ he said. ‘It would take more than such an orc-scratch to keep me back.’

‘I will tend it, while you rest’, said Aragorn.

The king now returned to the Hornburg, and slept, such a sleep of quiet as he had not known for many years, and the remainder of his chosen company rested also. But the others, all that were not hurt or wounded, began a great labour; for many had fallen in the battle and lay dead upon the field or in the Deep.

No Orcs remained alive; their bodies were uncounted. But a great many of the hillmen had given themselves up; and they were afraid, and cried for mercy.

The Men of the Mark took their weapons from them, and set them to work.

‘Help now to repair the evil in which you have joined’, said Erkenbrand; ‘and afterwards you shall take an oath never again to pass the Fords of Isen in arms, nor to march with the enemies of Men; and then you shall go free back to your land. For you have been deluded by Saruman. Many of you have got death as the reward of your trust in him; but had you conquered, little better would your wages have been.’

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The men of Dunland were amazed, for Saruman had told them that the men of Rohan were cruel and burned their captives alive. In the midst of the field before the Hornburg two mounds were raised, and beneath them were laid all the Riders of the Mark who fell in the defence, those of the East Dales upon one side, and those of Westfold upon the other. In a grave alone under the shadow of the Hornburg lay Háma, captain of the King's guard. He fell before the Gate.

The Orcs were piled in great heaps, away from the mounds of Men, not far from the eaves of the forest. And the people were troubled in their minds; for the heaps of carrion were too great for burial or for burning. They had little wood for firing, and none would have dared to take an axe to the strange trees, even if Gandalf had not warned them to hurt neither bark nor bough at their great peril.

‘Let the Orcs lie’, said Gandalf. ‘The morning may bring new counsel.’

In the afternoon the King's company prepared to depart. The work of burial was then but beginning; and Théoden mourned for the loss of Háma, his captain, and cast the first earth upon his grave. ‘Great injury indeed has Saruman done to me and all this land’, he said; ‘and I will remember it, when we meet.’

The sun was already drawing near the hills upon the west of the Coomb, when at last Théoden and Gandalf and their companions rode down from the Dike. Behind them were gathered a great host, both of the Riders and of the people of Westfold, old and young, women and children, who had come out from the caves. A song of victory they sang with clear voices; and then they fell silent, wondering what would chance, for their eyes were on the trees and they feared them.

The Riders came to the wood, and they halted; horse and man, they were unwilling to pass in. The trees were grey and menacing, and a shadow or a mist was about them. The ends of their long sweeping boughs hung down like searching fingers, their roots stood up from the ground like the limbs of strange monsters, and dark caverns opened beneath them. But Gandalf went forward, leading the company, and where the road from the Hornburg met the trees they

leading the company, and where the road from the morning met the noon they saw now an opening like an arched gate under mighty boughs; and through it Gandalf passed, and they followed him. Then to their amazement they found that the road ran on, and the Deeping-stream beside it; and the sky was open above and full of golden light. But on either side the great aisles of the wood were already wrapped in dusk, stretching away into impenetrable shadows; and there they heard the creaking and groaning of boughs, and far cries, and a rumour of word551

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less voices, murmuring angrily. No Orc or other living creature could be seen.

Legolas and Gimli were now riding together upon one horse; and they kept close beside Gandalf, for Gimli was afraid of the wood.

‘It is hot in here’, said Legolas to Gandalf. ‘I feel a great wrath about me. Do you not feel the air throb in your ears?’

‘Yes’, said Gandalf.

‘What has become of the miserable Orcs?’ said Legolas.

‘That, I think, no one will ever know’, said Gandalf.

They rode in silence for a while; but Legolas was ever glancing from side to side, and would often have halted to listen to the sounds of the wood, if Gimli had allowed it.

‘These are the strangest trees that ever I saw’, he said; ‘and I have seen many an oak grow from acorn to ruinous age. I wish that there were leisure now to walk among them: they have voices, and in time I might come to understand their thought.’

‘No, no!’ said Gimli. ‘Let us leave them! I guess their thought already: hatred of all that go on two legs; and their speech is of crushing and strangling.’

‘Not of all that go on two legs’, said Legolas. ‘There I think you are wrong. It is Orcs that they hate. For they do not belong here and know little of Elves and Men. For many are the valleys where they grow. From the deep dales of

men. Far away are the valleys where they sprang. From the deep dales of Fangorn, Gimli, that is whence they come, I guess.'

'Then that is the most perilous wood in Middle-earth', said Gimli. 'I should be grateful for the part they have played, but I do not love them. You may think them wonderful, but I have seen a greater wonder in this land, more beautiful than any grove or glade that ever grew: my heart is still full of it. 'Strange are the ways of Men, Legolas! Here they have one of the marvels of the Northern World, and what do they say of it? Caves, they say! Caves! Holes to fly to in time of war, to store fodder in! My good Legolas, do you know that the caverns of Helm's Deep are vast and beautiful? There would be an endless pilgrimage of Dwarves, merely to gaze at them, if such things were known to be. Aye indeed, they would pay pure gold for a brief glance!'

'And I would give gold to be excused', said Legolas; 'and double to be let out, if I strayed in!'

'You have not seen, so I forgive your jest', said Gimli. 'But you speak like a fool. Do you think those halls are fair, where your King dwells under the hill in Mirkwood, and Dwarves helped in their making long ago? They are but hovels compared with the caverns I have seen here: immeasurable 552

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halls, filled with an everlasting music of water that tinkles into pools, as fair as Kheled-zâram in the starlight.

'And, Legolas, when the torches are kindled and men walk on the sandy floors under the echoing domes, ah! then, Legolas, gems and crystals and veins of precious ore glint in the polished walls; and the light glows through folded marbles, shell-like, translucent as the living hands of Queen Galadriel. There are columns of white and saffron and dawn-rose, Legolas, fluted and twisted into dreamlike forms; they spring up from many-coloured floors to meet the glistening pendants of the roof: wings, ropes, curtains fine as frozen clouds; spears, banners, pinnacles of suspended palaces! Still lakes mirror them: a glimmering world looks up from dark pools covered with clear glass; cities, such as the mind of Durin could scarce have imagined in his sleep, stretch on through avenues and pillared courts, on into the dark recesses where no light can come. And blink! a silver drop falls, and the sound twinkles in the glass, make all the

And pink! a silver drop falls, and the round wrinkles in the glass make all the towers bend and waver like weeds and corals in a grotto of the sea. Then evening comes: they fade and twinkle out; the torches pass on into another chamber and another dream. There is chamber after chamber, Legolas; hall opening out of hall, dome after dome, stair beyond stair; and still the winding paths lead on into the mountains' heart. Caves! The Caverns of Helm's Deep! Happy was the chance that drove me there! It makes me weep to leave them.'

'Then I will wish you this fortune for your comfort, Gimli', said the Elf, 'that you may come safe from war and return to see them again. But do not tell all your kindred! There seems little left for them to do, from your account. Maybe the men of this land are wise to say little: one family of busy dwarves with hammer and chisel might mar more than they made.'

'No, you do not understand', said Gimli. 'No dwarf could be unmoved by such loveliness. None of Durin's race would mine those caves for stones or ore, not if diamonds and gold could be got there. Do you cut down groves of blossoming trees in the spring-time for firewood? We would tend these glades of flowering stone, not quarry them. With cautious skill, tap by tap - a small chip of rock and no more, perhaps, in a whole anxious day - so we could work, and as the years went by, we should open up new ways, and display far chambers that are still dark, glimpsed only as a void beyond fissures in the rock. And lights, Legolas! We should make lights, such lamps as once shone in Khazad-dûm; and when we wished we would drive away the night that has lain there since the hills were made; and when we desired rest, we would let the night return.'

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'You move me, Gimli', said Legolas. 'I have never heard you speak like this before. Almost you make me regret that I have not seen these caves. Come! Let us make this bargain-if we both return safe out of the perils that await us, we will journey for a while together. You shall visit Fangorn with me, and then I will come with you to see Helm's Deep.'

'That would not be the way of return that I should choose', said Gimli. 'But I will endure Fangorn. if I have your promise to come back to the caves and share

their wonder with me.'

'You have my promise', said Legolas. 'But alas! Now we must leave behind both cave and wood for a while: See! We are coming to the end of the trees. How far is it to Isengard, Gandalf?'

'About fifteen leagues, as the crows of Saruman make it.' said Gandalf:

'five from the mouth of Deeping-coomb to the Fords: and ten more from there to the gates of Isengard. But we shall not ride all the way this night.'

'And when we come there, what shall we see?' asked Gimli. 'You may know, but I cannot guess.'

'I do not know myself for certain', answered the wizard. 'I was there at nightfall yesterday, but much may have happened since. Yet I think that you will not say that the journey was in vain - not though the Glittering Caves of Aglarond be left behind.'

At last the company passed through the trees, and found that they had come to the bottom of the Coomb, where the road from Helm's Deep branched, going one way east to Edoras, and the other north to the Fords of Isen. As they rode from under the eaves of the wood, Legolas halted and looked back with regret. Then he gave a sudden cry.

'There are eyes!' he said. 'Eyes looking out from the shadows of the boughs! I never saw such eyes before.'

The others, surprised by his cry, halted and turned; but Legolas started to ride back.

'No, no!' cried Gimli. 'Do as you please in your madness, but let me first get down from this horse! I wish to see no eyes!' 'Stay, Legolas Greenleaf!' said Gandalf. 'Do not go back into the wood, not yet! Now is not your time.'

Even as he spoke, there came forward out of the trees three strange shapes. As tall as trolls they were, twelve feet or more in height; their strong bodies, stout as young trees, seemed to be clad with raiment or with hide of close-fitting grey and brown. Their limbs were long, and their hands had many fingers; their hair was stiff, and their beards greygreen as moss. They gazed out with solemn eyes,

but they were not looking at the riders: their eyes were bent northwards.
Suddenly they lifted

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their long hands to their mouths, and sent forth ringing calls, clear as notes of a horn, but more musical and various. The calls were answered; and turning again, the riders saw other creatures of the same kind approaching, striding through the grass. They came swiftly from the North, walking like wading herons in their gait, but not in their speed; for their legs in their long paces beat quicker than the heron's wings. The riders cried aloud in wonder, and some set their hands upon their swordhilts.

‘You need no weapons’, said Gandalf. ‘These are but herdsmen. They are not enemies, indeed they are not concerned with us at all.’

So it seemed to be; for as he spoke the tall creatures, without a glance at the riders, strode into the wood and vanished.

‘Herdsmen!’ said Théoden. ‘Where are their flocks? What are they, Gandalf? For it is plain that to you, at any rate, they are not strange.’

‘They are the shepherds of the trees’, answered Gandalf. ‘Is it so long since you listened to tales by the fireside? There are children in your land who, out of the twisted threads of story, could pick the answer to your question. You have seen Ents, O King, Ents out of Fangorn Forest, which in your tongue you call the Entwood. Did you think that the name was given only in idle fancy? Nay, Théoden, it is otherwise: to them you are but the passing tale; all the years from Eorl the Young to Théoden the Old are of little count to them; and all the deeds of your house but a small matter.’

The king was silent. ‘Ents!’ he said at length. ‘Out of the shadows of legend I begin a little to understand the marvel of the trees, I think. I have lived to see strange days. Long we have tended our beasts and our fields, built our houses, wrought our tools, or ridden away to help in the wars of Minas Tirith. And that we called the life of Men, the way of the world. We cared little for what lay beyond the borders of our land. Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom. And

now the songs have come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the Sun.'

'You should be glad, Théoden King', said Gandalf. 'For not only the little life of Men is now endangered, but the life also of those things which you have deemed the matter of legend. You are not without allies, even if you know them not.'

'Yet also I should be sad', said Théoden. 'For however the fortune of war shall go, may it not so end that much that was fair and wonderful shall pass for ever out of Middle-earth?'

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'It may', said Gandalf. 'The evil of Sauron cannot be wholly cured, nor made as if it had not been. But to such days we are *doomed*. Let us now go on with the journey we have begun!'

The company turned then away from the Coomb and from the wood and took the road towards the Fords. Legolas followed reluctantly. The sun had set, already it had sunk behind the rim of the world; but as they rode out from the shadow of the hills and looked west to the Gap of Rohan the sky was still red, and a burning light was under the floating clouds. Dark against it there wheeled and flew many black-winged birds. Some passed overhead with mournful cries, returning to their homes among the rocks.

'The carrion-fowl have been busy about the battle-field', said Éomer. They rode now at an easy pace and dark came down upon the plains about them. The slow moon mounted, now waxing towards the full, and in its cold silver light the swelling grasslands rose and fell like a wide grey sea. They had ridden for some four hours from the branching of the roads when they drew near to the Fords. Long slopes ran swiftly down to where the river spread in stony shoals between high grassy terraces. Borne upon the wind they heard the howling of wolves. Their hearts were heavy, remembering the many men that had fallen in battle in this place.

The road dipped between rising turf-banks, carving its way through the terraces

to the river's edge, and up again upon the further side. There were three lines of flat stepping-stones across the stream, and between them fords for horses, that went from either brink to a bare eyot in the midst. The riders looked down upon the crossings, and it seemed strange to them; for the Fords had ever been a place full of the rush and chatter of water upon stones; but now they were silent. The beds of the stream were almost dry, a bare waste of shingles and grey sand.

‘This is become a dreary place’, said Éomer. ‘What sickness has befallen the river? Many fair things Saruman has destroyed: has he devoured the springs of Isen too?’ ‘So it would seem’, said Gandalf.

THE DOWNFALL

OF THE

LORD OF THE RINGS

AND THE

RETURN OF THE KING

(as seen by the Little People; being the memoirs of Bilbo and Frodo of the Shire, supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise.)
Together with extracts from Books of Lore translated by Bilbo in Rivendell.

‘Why, you have nearly finished it, Mr. Frodo!’ Sam exclaimed. ‘Well, you have kept at it, I must say.’

‘I have quite finished, Sam’, said Frodo. ‘The last pages are for you.’

On September the twenty-first they set out together, Frodo on *The Pony* that had borne him all the way from Minas Tirith, and was now called 1041

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Strider; and Sam on his beloved Bill. It was a fair golden morning, and Sam did not ask where they were going: he thought he could guess. They took the Stock Road over the hills and went towards the Woody End, and they let their ponies walk at their leisure. They camped in the Green Hills, and on September the twenty-second they rode gently down into the beginning of the trees as afternoon was wearing away.

‘If that isn’t the very tree you hid behind when the Black Rider first showed up, Mr. Frodo!’ said Sam pointing to the left. ‘It seems like a dream now.’

It was evening, and the stars were glimmering in the eastern sky as they passed the ruined oak and turned and went on down the hill between the hazel-thickets. Sam was silent, deep in his memories. Presently he became aware that Frodo was singing softly to himself, singing the old walking-song, but the words were not quite the same.

Still round the corner there may wait A new road or a secret gate;

And though I oft have passed them by, A day will come at last when I

Shall take the hidden paths that run

West of the Moon, East of the Sun.

And as if in answer, from down below, coming up the road out of the valley, voices sang: *A! Elbereth Gilthoniel!*

silivren penna míriel

o menel aglar elenath,

Gilthoniel, A! Elbereth!

We still remember, we who dwell

In this far land beneath the trees

The starlight on the Western Seas.

Frodo and Sam halted and sat silent in the soft shadows, until they saw a shimmer as the travellers came towards them.

There was Gildor and many fair Elven folk; and there to Sam's wonder rode Elrond and Galadriel. Elrond wore a mantle of grey and had a star upon his forehead, and a silver harp was in his hand, and upon his finger was a ring of gold with a great blue stone, Vilya, mightiest of the Three. But Galadriel sat upon a white palfrey and was robed all in glimmering

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white, like clouds about the Moon; for she herself seemed to shine with a soft light. On her finger was Nenya, the ring wrought of *mithril*, that bore a single white stone flickering like a frosty star. Riding slowly behind on a small grey pony, and seeming to nod in his sleep, was Bilbo himself. Elrond greeted them gravely and graciously, and Galadriel smiled upon them. 'Well, Master Samwise', she said. 'I hear and see that you have used my gift well. The Shire

shall now be more than ever blessed and beloved.' Sam bowed, but found nothing to say. He had forgotten how beautiful the Lady was.

Then Bilbo woke up and opened his eyes. 'Hullo, Frodo!' he said.

'Well, I have passed the Old Took today! So that's settled. And now I think I am quite ready to go on another journey. Are you coming?'

'Yes, I am coming', said Frodo. 'The Ring-bearers should go together.'

'Where are you going, Master?' cried Sam, though at last he understood what was happening.

'To the Havens, Sam', said Frodo.

'And I can't come.'

'No, Sam. Not yet anyway, not further than the Havens. Though you too were a Ring-bearer, if only for a little while. Your time may come. Do not be too sad, Sam. You cannot be always torn in two. You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do.'

'But', said Sam, and tears started in his eyes, 'I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire, too. for years and years, after all you have done.'

'So I thought too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them. But you are my heir: all that I had and might have had I leave to you. And also you have Rose, and *Elanor*; and Frodo-lad will come, and Rosie-lass, and Merry, and Goldilocks, and Pippin; and perhaps more that I cannot see. Your hands and your wits will be needed everywhere. You will be the Mayor, of course, as long as you want to be, and the most famous gardener in history; and you will read things out of the Red Book, and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone. so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more. And that will keep you as busy and as happy as anyone can be, as long as your part of the Story goes on.

'Come now, ride with me!'

Then Elrond and Galadriel rode on; for the Third Age was over, and the Days of

Then Elrond and Galadriel rode on, for the Third Age was over, and the Days of the Rings were passed, and an end was come of the story and song of those times. With them went many Elves of the High Kindred 1043

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who would no longer stay in Middle-earth; and among them, filled with a sadness that was yet blessed and without bitterness, rode Sam, and Frodo, and Bilbo, and the Elves delighted to honour them.

Though they rode through the midst of the Shire all the evening and all the night, none saw them pass, save the wild creatures; or here and there some wanderer in the dark who saw a swift shimmer under the trees, or a light and shadow flowing through the grass as the Moon went westward. And when they had passed from the Shire, going about the south skirts of the White Downs, they came to the Far Downs, and to the Towers, and looked on the distant Sea; and so they rode down at last to Mithlond, to the Grey Havens in the long firth of Lune.

As they came to the gates Círdan the Shipwright came forth to greet them. Very tall he was, and his beard was long, and he was grey and old, save that his eyes were keen as stars; and he looked at them and bowed, and said: 'All is now ready.'

Then Círdan led them to the Havens, and there was a white ship lying, and upon the quay beside a great grey horse stood a figure robed all in white awaiting them. As he turned and came towards them Frodo saw that Gandalf now wore openly upon his hand the Third Ring, Narya the Great, and the stone upon it was red as fire. Then those who were to go were glad, for they knew that Gandalf also would take ship with them. But Sam was now sorrowful at heart, and it seemed to him that if the parting would be bitter, more grievous still would be the long road home alone. But even as they stood there, and the Elves were going aboard, and all was being made ready to depart, up rode Merry and Pippin in great haste. And amid his tears Pippin laughed.

'You tried to give us the slip once before and failed, Frodo,' he said.

'This time you have nearly succeeded, but you have failed again. It was not Sam, though, that gave you away this time, but Gandalf himself!'

‘Yes’, said Gandalf; ‘for it will be better to ride back three together ‘than one alone. Well, here at last, dear friends, on the shores of the Sea comes the end of our fellowship in Middle-earth. Go in peace! I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil.’

Then Frodo kissed Merry and Pippin, and last of all Sam, and went aboard; and the sails were drawn up, and the wind blew, and slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth; and the light of the glass of Galadriel that Frodo bore glimmered and was lost. And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his 1044

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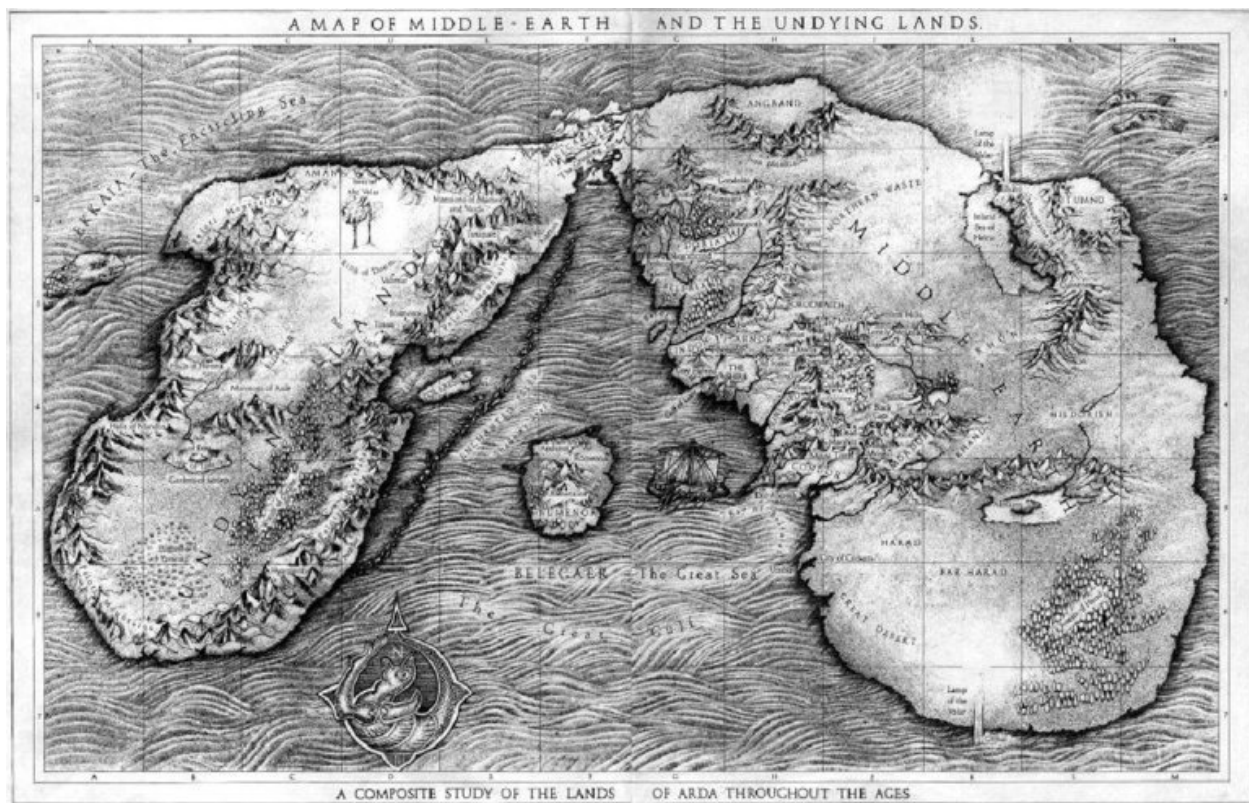
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dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.

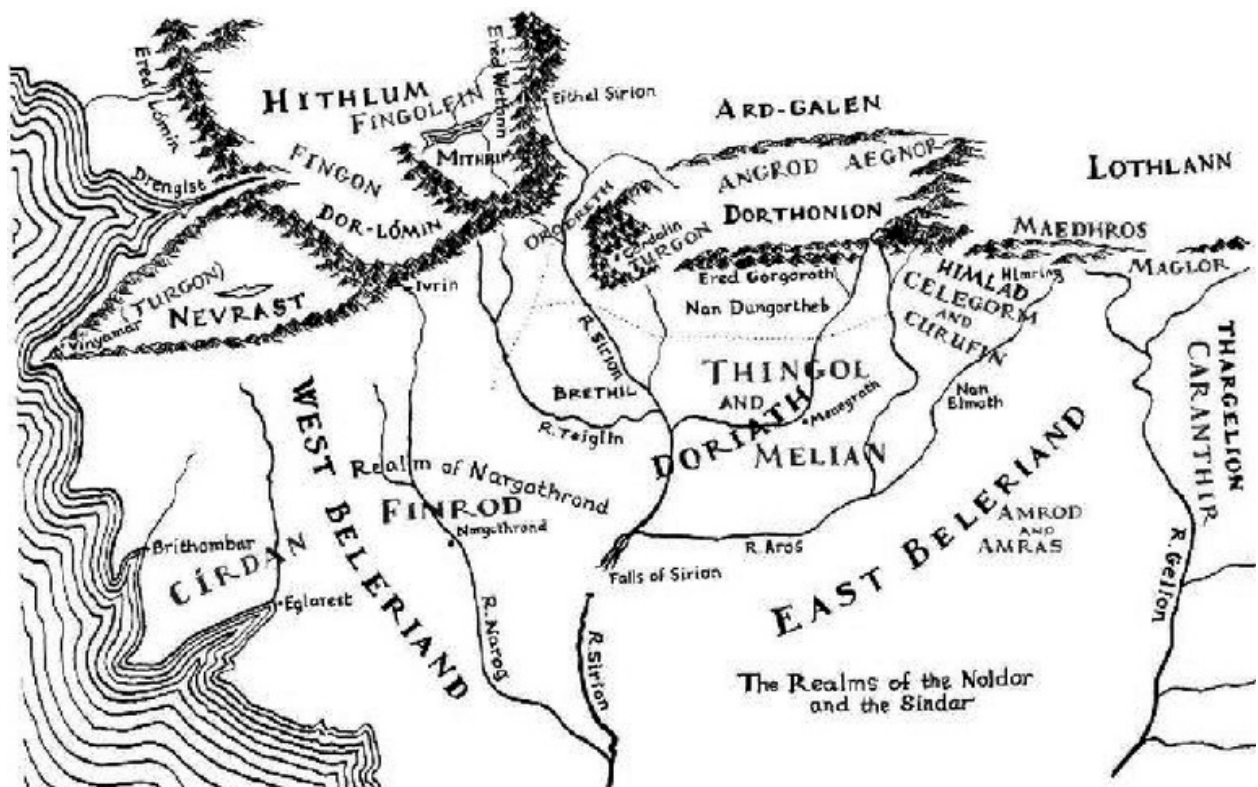
But to Sam the evening deepened to darkness as he stood at the Haven; and as he looked at the grey sea he saw only a shadow on the waters that was soon lost in the West. There still he stood far into the night, hearing only the sigh and murmur of the waves on the shores of Middle-earth, and the sound of them sank deep into his heart. Beside him stood Merry and Pippin, and they were silent.

At last the three companions turned away, and never again looking back they rode slowly homewards; and they spoke no word to one another until they came back to the Shire. but each had great comfort in his friends on the long grey road.

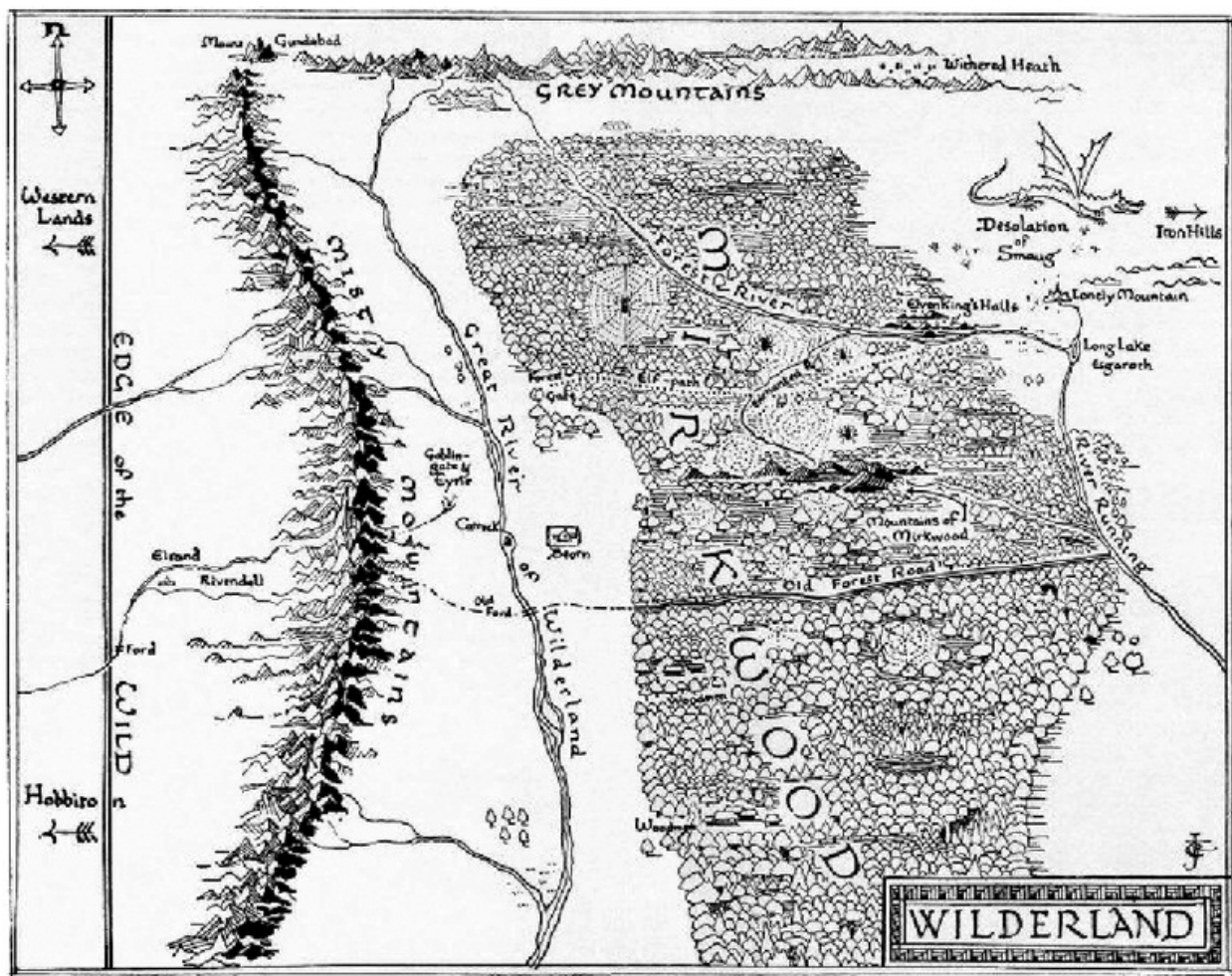
At last they rode over the downs and took the East Road, and then Merry and Pippin rode on to Buckland; and already they were singing again as they went. But Sam turned to Bywater, and so came back up the Hill, as day was ending once more. And he went on, and there was yellow light, and fire within; and the evening meal was ready, and he was expected. And Rose drew him in, and set him in his chair, and put little *Elanor* upon his lap. He drew a deep breath. ‘Well, I’m back’, he said.











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