

The talk did not die down in nine or even ninety-nine days. The second disappearance of Mr Bilbo Baggins was discussed in Hobbiton, and indeed all over the Shire, for a year and a day, and was remembered much longer than that. It became a fireside-story for young hobbits; and eventually Mad Baggins, who used to vanish with a bang and a flash and reappear with bags of jewels and gold, became a favourite character of legend and lived on long after all the true events were forgotten. But in the meantime, the general opinion in the neighbourhood was that Bilbo, who had always been rather cracked, had at last gone quite mad, and had run off into the Blue. There he had undoubtedly fallen into a pool or a river and come to a tragic, but hardly an untimely, end. The blame was mostly laid on Gandalf. 'If only that dratted wizard will leave young Frodo alone, perhaps he'll settle down and grow some hobbit-sense,' they said. And to all appearance the wizard did leave Frodo alone, and he did settle down, but the growth of hobbit-sense was not very noticeable. Indeed, he at once began to carry on Bilbo's reputation for oddity. He refused to go into mourning; and the next year he gave a party in honour of Bilbo's hundred-and-twelfth birthday, which he called a Hundred-weight Feast. But that was short of the mark, for twenty guests were invited and there were several meals at which it snowed food and rained drink, as hobbits say. Some people were rather shocked; but Frodo kept up the custom of giving Bilbo's Birthday Party year after year until they got used to it. He said that he did not think Bilbo was dead. When they asked: 'Where is he then?' he shrugged his shoulders. He lived alone, as Bilbo had done; but he had a good many friends, especially among the younger hobbits (mostly descendants of the Old Took) who had as children been fond of Bilbo and often in and out of Bag End. Folco Boffin and Fredegar Bolger were two of these; but his closest friends were Peregrin Took (usually called Pippin), and Merry Brandybuck (his real name was Meriadoc, but that was seldom remembered). Frodo went tramping over the Shire with them; but more often he wandered by himself, and to the amazement of sensible folk he was sometimes seen far from home walking in the hills and woods under the starlight. Merry and Pippin suspected that he visited the Elves at times, as Bilbo had done. As time went on, people began to notice that Frodo also showed signs of good 'preservation': outwardly he retained the appearance of a robust and energetic hobbit just out of his tweens. 'Some folk have all the luck,' they said; but it was not until Frodo approached the usually more sober age of fifty that they began to think it queer. Frodo himself, after the first shock, found that being his own master and the Mr Baggins of Bag End was rather pleasant. For some years he was quite happy and did not worry much about the future. But half unknown to himself the regret that he had not gone with Bilbo was steadily growing. He found himself wondering at times, especially in the autumn, about the wild lands, and strange visions of mountains that he had never seen came into his dreams. He began to say to himself: 'Perhaps I shall cross the River myself one day'. To which the other half of his mind always replied: 'Not yet'. So it went on, until his forties were running out, and his fiftieth birthday was drawing near: fifty was a number that he felt was somehow significant (or ominous); it was at any rate at that age that adventure had suddenly befallen Bilbo. Frodo began to feel restless, and the old paths seemed too well-trodden. He looked at maps, and wondered what lay beyond their edges: maps made in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders. He took to wandering further afield and more often by himself; and Merry and his other friends watched him anxiously. Often he was seen walking and talking with the strange wayfarers that began at this time to appear in the Shire. There were rumours of strange things happening in the world outside; and as Gandalf had not at that time appeared or sent any message for several years, Frodo gathered all the news he could. Elves, who seldom walked in the Shire, could now be

seen passing westward through the woods in the evening, passing and not returning; but they were leaving Middle-earth and were no longer concerned with its troubles. There were, however, dwarves on the road in unusual numbers. The ancient East–West Road ran through the Shire to its end at the Grey Havens, and dwarves had always used it on their way to their mines in the Blue Mountains. They were the hobbits’ chief source of news from distant parts – if they wanted any: as a rule dwarves said little and hobbits asked no more. But now Frodo often met strange dwarves of far countries, seeking refuge in the West. They were troubled, and some spoke in whispers of the Enemy and of the Land of Mordor. That name the hobbits only knew in legends of the dark past, like a shadow in the background of their memories; but it was ominous and disquieting. It seemed that the evil power in Mirkwood had been driven out by the White Council only to reappear in greater strength in the old strongholds of Mordor. The Dark Tower had been rebuilt, it was said. From there the power was spreading far and wide, and away far east and south there were wars and growing fear. Orcs were multiplying again in the mountains. Trolls were abroad, no longer dull-witted, but cunning and armed with dreadful weapons. And there were murmured hints of creatures more terrible than all these, but they had no name. Little of all this, of course, reached the ears of ordinary hobbits. But even the deafest and most stay-at-home began to hear queer tales; and those whose business took them to the borders saw strange things. The conversation in The Green Dragon at Bywater, one evening in the spring of Frodo’s fiftieth year, showed that even in the comfortable heart of the Shire rumours had been heard, though most hobbits still laughed at them. Sam Gamgee was sitting in one corner near the fire, and opposite him was Ted Sandyman, the miller’s son; and there were various other rustic hobbits listening to their talk. ‘Queer things you do hear these days, to be sure,’ said Sam. ‘Ah,’ said Ted, ‘you do, if you listen. But I can hear fireside- tales and children’s stories at home, if I want to’. ‘No doubt you can,’ retorted Sam, ‘and I daresay there’s more truth in some of them than you reckon. Who invented the stories anyway? Take dragons now’. ‘No thank ’ee,’ said Ted, ‘I won’t. I heard tell of them when I was a youngster, but there’s no call to believe in them now. There’s only one Dragon in Bywater, and that’s Green,’ he said, getting a general laugh. ‘All right,’ said Sam, laughing with the rest. ‘But what about these Tree-men, these giants, as you might call them? They do say that one bigger than a tree was seen up away beyond the North Moors not long back’. ‘Who’s they?’ ‘My cousin Hal for one. He works for Mr Boffin at Overhill and goes up to the Northfarthing for the hunting. He saw one’. ‘Says he did, perhaps. Your Hal’s always saying he’s seen things; and maybe he sees things that ain’t there’. ‘But this one was as big as an elm tree, and walking – walking seven yards to a stride, if it was an inch’. ‘Then I bet it wasn’t an inch. What he saw was an elm tree, as like as not’. ‘But this one was walking, I tell you; and there ain’t no elm tree on the North Moors’. ‘Then Hal can’t have seen one,’ said Ted. There was some laughing and clapping: the audience seemed to think that Ted had scored a point. ‘All the same,’ said Sam, ‘you can’t deny that others besides our Halfast have seen queer folk crossing the Shire – crossing it, mind you: there are more that are turned back at the borders. The Bounders have never been so busy before. ‘And I’ve heard tell that Elves are moving west. They do say they are going to the harbours, out away beyond the White Towers’. Sam waved his arm vaguely: neither he nor any of them knew how far it was to the Sea, past the old towers beyond the western borders of the Shire. But it was an old tradition that away over there stood the Grey Havens, from which at times elven-ships set sail, never to return. ‘They are sailing, sailing, sailing over the Sea, they are going into the West and leaving us,’ said Sam, half chanting the words, shaking his head sadly and solemnly. But Ted laughed. ‘Well, that isn’t anything new, if you believe the old tales.

And I don't see what it matters to me or you. Let them sail! But I warrant you haven't seen them doing it; nor anyone else in the Shire'. 'Well, I don't know,' said Sam thoughtfully. He believed he had once seen an Elf in the woods, and still hoped to see more one day. Of all the legends that he had heard in his early years such fragments of tales and half-remembered stories about the Elves as the hobbits knew, had always moved him most deeply. 'There are some, even in these parts, as know the Fair Folk and get news of them,' he said. 'There's Mr Baggins now, that I work for. He told me that they were sailing and he knows a bit about Elves. And old Mr Bilbo knew more: many's the talk I had with him when I was a little lad'. 'Oh, they're both cracked,' said Ted. 'Leastways old Bilbo was cracked, and Frodo's cracking. If that's where you get your news from, you'll never want for moonshine. Well, friends, I'm off home. Your good health!' He drained his mug and went out noisily. Sam sat silent and said no more. He had a good deal to think about. For one thing, there was a lot to do up in the Bag End garden, and he would have a busy day tomorrow, if the weather cleared. The grass was growing fast. But Sam had more on his mind than gardening. After a while he sighed, and got up and went out. It was early April and the sky was now clearing after heavy rain. The sun was down, and a cool pale evening was quietly fading into night. He walked home under the early stars through Hobbiton and up the Hill, whistling softly and thoughtfully. It was just at this time that Gandalf reappeared after his long absence. For three years after the Party he had been away. Then he paid Frodo a brief visit, and after taking a good look at him he went off again. During the next year or two he had turned up fairly often, coming unexpectedly after dusk, and going off without warning before sunrise. He would not discuss his own business and journeys, and seemed chiefly interested in small news about Frodo's health and doings. Then suddenly his visits had ceased. It was over nine years since Frodo had seen or heard of him, and he had begun to think that the wizard would never return and had given up all interest in hobbits. But that evening, as Sam was walking home and twilight was fading, there came the once familiar tap on the study window. Frodo welcomed his old friend with surprise and great delight. They looked hard at one another. 'All well eh?' said Gandalf. 'You look the same as ever, Frodo!' 'So do you,' Frodo replied; but secretly he thought that Gandalf looked older and more careworn. He pressed him for news of himself and of the wide world, and soon they were deep in talk, and they stayed up far into the night. Next morning after a late breakfast, the wizard was sitting with Frodo by the open window of the study. A bright fire was on the hearth, but the sun was warm, and the wind was in the South. Everything looked fresh, and the new green of spring was shimmering in the fields and on the tips of the trees' fingers. Gandalf was thinking of a spring, nearly eighty years before, when Bilbo had run out of Bag End without a handkerchief. His hair was perhaps whiter than it had been then, and his beard and eyebrows were perhaps longer, and his face more lined with care and wisdom; but his eyes were as bright as ever, and he smoked and blew smoke-rings with the same vigour and delight. He was smoking now in silence, for Frodo was sitting still, deep in thought. Even in the light of morning he felt the dark shadow of the tidings that Gandalf had brought. At last he broke the silence. 'Last night you began to tell me strange things about my ring, Gandalf,' he said. 'And then you stopped, because you said that such matters were best left until daylight. Don't you think you had better finish now? You say the ring is dangerous, far more dangerous than I guess. In what way?' 'In many ways,' answered the wizard. 'It is far more powerful than I ever dared to think at first, so powerful that in the end it would utterly overcome anyone of mortal race who possessed it. It would possess him. 'In Eregion long ago many Elven-rings were made, magic rings as you call them, and they were, of course, of various kinds: some more

potent and some less. The lesser rings were only essays in the craft before it was full-grown, and to the Elven-smiths they were but trifles – yet still to my mind dangerous for mortals. But the Great Rings, the Rings of Power, they were perilous. ‘A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he fades: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the Dark Power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the Dark Power will devour him’. ‘How terrifying!’ said Frodo. There was another long silence. The sound of Sam Gamgee cutting the lawn came in from the garden. ‘How long have you known this?’ asked Frodo at length. ‘And how much did Bilbo know?’ ‘Bilbo knew no more than he told you, I am sure,’ said Gandalf. ‘He would certainly never have passed on to you anything that he thought would be a danger, even though I promised to look after you. He thought the ring was very beautiful, and very useful at need; and if anything was wrong or queer, it was himself. He said that it was “growing on his mind”, and he was always worrying about it; but he did not suspect that the ring itself was to blame. Though he had found out that the thing needed looking after; it did not seem always of the same size or weight; it shrank or expanded in an odd way, and might suddenly slip off a finger where it had been tight’. ‘Yes, he warned me of that in his last letter,’ said Frodo, ‘so I have always kept it on its chain’. ‘Very wise,’ said Gandalf. ‘But as for his long life, Bilbo never connected it with the ring at all. He took all the credit for that to himself, and he was very proud of it. Though he was getting restless and uneasy. Thin and stretched he said. A sign that the ring was getting control’. ‘How long have you known all this?’ asked Frodo again. ‘Known?’ said Gandalf. ‘I have known much that only the Wise know, Frodo. But if you mean “known about this ring”, well, I still do not know, one might say. There is a last test to make. But I no longer doubt my guess. ‘When did I first begin to guess?’ he mused, searching back in memory. ‘Let me see – it was in the year that the White Council drove the Dark Power from Mirkwood, just before the Battle of Five Armies, that Bilbo found his ring. A shadow fell on my heart then, though I did not know yet what I feared. I wondered often how Gollum came by a Great Ring, as plainly it was – that at least was clear from the first. Then I heard Bilbo’s strange story of how he had “won” it, and I could not believe it. When I at last got the truth out of him, I saw at once that he had been trying to put his claim to the ring beyond doubt. Much like Gollum with his “birthday- present”. The lies were too much alike for my comfort. Clearly the ring had an unwholesome power that set to work on its keeper at once. That was the first real warning I had that all was not well. I told Bilbo often that such rings were better left unused; but he resented it, and soon got angry. There was little else that I could do. I could not take it from him without doing greater harm; and I had no right to do so anyway. I could only watch and wait. I might perhaps have consulted Saruman the White, but something always held me back’. ‘Who is he?’ asked Frodo. ‘I have never heard of him before’. ‘Maybe not,’ answered Gandalf. ‘Hobbits are, or were, no concern of his. Yet he is great among the Wise. He is the chief of my order and the head of the Council. His knowledge is deep, but his pride has grown with it, and he takes ill any meddling. The lore of the Elven-rings, great and small, is his province. He has long studied it, seeking the lost secrets of their making; but when the Rings were debated in the Council, all that he would reveal to us of his ring-lore told against my fears. So my doubt slept – but uneasily. Still I watched and I waited. ‘And all seemed well with Bilbo. And the years passed. Yes, they passed, and they seemed not to touch him. He showed no signs of age. The shadow fell on me again.

But I said to myself: “After all he comes of a long-lived family on his mother’s side. There is time yet. Wait!” ‘And I waited. Until that night when he left this house. He said and did things then that filled me with a fear that no words of Saruman could allay. I knew at last that something dark and deadly was at work. And I have spent most of the years since then in finding out the truth of it’. ‘There wasn’t any permanent harm done, was there?’ asked Frodo anxiously. ‘He would get all right in time, wouldn’t he? Be able to rest in peace, I mean?’ ‘He felt better at once,’ said Gandalf. ‘But there is only one Power in this world that knows all about the Rings and their effects; and as far as I know there is no Power in the world that knows all about hobbits. Among the Wise I am the only one that goes in for hobbit-lore: an obscure branch of knowledge, but full of surprises. Soft as butter they can be, and yet sometimes as tough as old tree-roots. I think it likely that some would resist the Rings far longer than most of the Wise would believe. I don’t think you need worry about Bilbo. ‘Of course, he possessed the ring for many years, and used it, so it might take a long while for the influence to wear off – before it was safe for him to see it again, for instance. Otherwise, he might live on for years, quite happily: just stop as he was when he parted with it. For he gave it up in the end of his own accord: an important point. No, I was not troubled about dear Bilbo any more, once he had let the thing go. It is for you that I feel responsible. ‘Ever since Bilbo left I have been deeply concerned about you, and about all these charming, absurd, helpless hobbits. It would be a grievous blow to the world, if the Dark Power overcame the Shire; if all your kind, jolly, stupid Bolgers, Hornblowers, Boffins, Bracegirdles, and the rest, not to mention the ridiculous Bagginses, became enslaved’. Frodo shuddered. ‘But why should we be?’ he asked. ‘And why should he want such slaves?’ ‘To tell you the truth,’ replied Gandalf, ‘I believe that hitherto – hitherto, mark you – he has entirely overlooked the existence of hobbits. You should be thankful. But your safety has passed. He does not need you – he has many more useful servants – but he won’t forget you again. And hobbits as miserable slaves would please him far more than hobbits happy and free. There is such a thing as malice and revenge’. ‘Revenge?’ said Frodo. ‘Revenge for what? I still don’t understand what all this has to do with Bilbo and myself, and our ring’. ‘It has everything to do with it,’ said Gandalf. ‘You do not know the real peril yet; but you shall. I was not sure of it myself when I was last here; but the time has come to speak. Give me the ring for a moment’. Frodo took it from his breeches-pocket, where it was clasped to a chain that hung from his belt. He unfastened it and handed it slowly to the wizard. It felt suddenly very heavy, as if either it or Frodo himself was in some way reluctant for Gandalf to touch it. Gandalf held it up. It looked to be made of pure and solid gold. ‘Can you see any markings on it?’ he asked. ‘No,’ said Frodo. ‘There are none. It is quite plain, and it never shows a scratch or sign of wear’. ‘Well then, look!’ To Frodo’s astonishment and distress the wizard threw it suddenly into the middle of a glowing corner of the fire. Frodo gave a cry and groped for the tongs; but Gandalf held him back. ‘Wait!’ he said in a commanding voice, giving Frodo a quick look from under his bristling brows. No apparent change came over the ring. After a while Gandalf got up, closed the shutters outside the window, and drew the curtains. The room became dark and silent, though the clack of Sam’s shears, now nearer to the windows, could still be heard faintly from the garden. For a moment the wizard stood looking at the fire; then he stooped and removed the ring to the hearth with the tongs, and at once picked it up. Frodo gasped. ‘It is quite cool,’ said Gandalf. ‘Take it!’ Frodo received it on his shrinking palm: it seemed to have become thicker and heavier than ever. ‘Hold it up!’ said Gandalf. ‘And look closely!’ As Frodo did so, he now saw fine lines, finer than the finest pen-strokes, running along the ring, outside and inside: lines of fire that seemed to form the letters of a flowing script. They shone

piercingly bright, and yet remote, as if out of a great depth. 'I cannot read the fiery letters,' said Frodo in a quavering voice. 'No,' said Gandalf, 'but I can. The letters are Elvish, of an ancient mode, but the language is that of Mordor, which I will not utter here. But this in the Common Tongue is what is said, close enough: One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them. It is only two lines of a verse long known in Elven-lore: 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'. He paused, and then said slowly in a deep voice: 'This is the Master-ring, the One Ring to rule them all. This is the One Ring that he lost many ages ago, to the great weakening of his power. He greatly desires it – but he must not get it'. Frodo sat silent and motionless. Fear seemed to stretch out a vast hand, like a dark cloud rising in the East and looming up to engulf him. 'This ring!' he stammered. 'How, how on earth did it come to me?' 'Ah!' said Gandalf. 'That is a very long story. The beginnings lie back in the Black Years, which only the lore-masters now remember. If I were to tell you all that tale, we should still be sitting here when Spring had passed into Winter. 'But last night I told you of Sauron the Great, the Dark Lord. The rumours that you have heard are true: he has indeed arisen again and left his hold in Mirkwood and returned to his ancient fastness in the Dark Tower of Mordor. That name even you hobbits have heard of, like a shadow on the borders of old stories. Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again'. 'I wish it need not have happened in my time,' said Frodo. 'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us. And already, Frodo, our time is beginning to look black. The Enemy is fast becoming very strong. His plans are far from ripe, I think, but they are ripening. We shall be hard put to it. We should be very hard put to it, even if it were not for this dreadful chance. 'The Enemy still lacks one thing to give him strength and knowledge to beat down all resistance, break the last defences, and cover all the lands in a second darkness. He lacks the One Ring. 'The Three, fairest of all, the Elf-lords hid from him, and his hand never touched them or sullied them. Seven the Dwarf-kings possessed, but three he has recovered, and the others the dragons have consumed. Nine he gave to Mortal Men, proud and great, and so ensnared them. Long ago they fell under the dominion of the One, and they became Ringwraiths, shadows under his great Shadow, his most terrible servants. Long ago. It is many a year since the Nine walked abroad. Yet who knows? As the Shadow grows once more, they too may walk again. But come! We will not speak of such things even in the morning of the Shire. 'So it is now: the Nine he has gathered to himself; the Seven also, or else they are destroyed. The Three are hidden still. But that no longer troubles him. He only needs the One; for he made that Ring himself, it is his, and he let a great part of his own former power pass into it, so that he could rule all the others. If he recovers it, then he will command them all again, wherever they be, even the Three, and all that has been wrought with them will be laid bare, and he will be stronger than ever. 'And this is the dreadful chance, Frodo. He believed that the One had perished; that the Elves had destroyed it, as should have been done. But he knows now that it has not perished, that it has been found. So he is seeking it, seeking it, and all his thought is bent on it. It is his great hope and our great fear'. 'Why, why wasn't it destroyed?' cried Frodo. 'And how did the Enemy ever come to lose it, if he was so strong, and it was so precious to him?' He clutched the Ring in his hand, as if he saw already dark fingers stretching out to seize it. 'It was taken from

him,' said Gandalf. 'The strength of the Elves to resist him was greater long ago; and not all Men were estranged from them. The Men of Westemnethe came to their aid. That is a which it might be good to recall; for there was sorrow then too, and gathering dark, but great valour, and great deeds that were not wholly vain. One day, perhaps, I will tell you all the tale, or you shall hear it told in full by one who knows it best. 'But for the moment, since most of all you need to know how this thing came to you, and that will be tale enough, this is all that I will say. It was Gil-galad, Elven-king and Elendil of Westemnethe who overthrew Sauron, though they themselves perished in the deed; and Isildur Elendil's son cut the Ring from Sauron's hand and took it for his own. Then Sauron was vanquished and his spirit fled and was hidden for long years, until his shadow took shape again in Mirkwood. 'But the Ring was lost. It fell into the Great River, Anduin, and vanished. For Isildur was marching north along the east banks of the River, and near the Gladden Fields he was waylaid by the Orcs of the Mountains, and almost all his folk were slain. He leaped into the waters, but the Ring slipped from his finger as he swam, and then the Orcs saw him and killed him with arrows'. Gandalf paused. 'And there in the dark pools amid the Gladden Fields,' he said, 'the Ring passed out of knowledge and legend; and even so much of its history is known now only to a few, and the Council of the Wise could discover no more. But at last I can carry on the story, I think. 'Long after, but still very long ago, there lived by the banks of the Great River on the edge of Wilderland a clever-handed and quiet-footed little people. I guess they were of hobbit-kind; akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors, for they loved the River, and often swam in it, or made little boats of reeds. There was among them a family of high repute, for it was large and wealthier than most, and it was ruled by a grandmother of the folk, stern and wise in old lore, such as they had. The most inquisitive and curious-minded of that family was called Smeagol. He was interested in roots and beginnings; he dived into deep pools; he burrowed under trees and growing plants; he tunneled into green mounds; and he ceased to look up at the hill-tops, or the leaves on trees, or the flowers opening in the air: his head and his eyes were downward. 'He had a friend called Deagol, of similar sort, sharper-eyed but not so quick and strong. On a time they took a boat and went down to the Gladden Fields, where there were great beds of iris and flowering reeds. There Smeagol got out and went nosing about the banks but Deagol sat in the boat and fished. Suddenly a great fish took his hook, and before he knew where he was, he was dragged out and down into the water, to the bottom. Then he let go of his line, for he thought he saw something shining in the river-bed; and holding his breath he grabbed at it. 'Then up he came spluttering, with weeds in his hair and a handful of mud; and he swam to the bank. And behold! when he washed the mud away, there in his hand lay a beautiful golden ring; and it shone and glittered in the sun, so that his heart was glad. But Smeagol had been watching him from behind a tree, and as Deagol gloated over the ring, Smeagol came softly up behind. ' "Give us that, Deagol, my love," said Smeagol, over his friend's shoulder. ' "Why?" said Deagol. ' "Because it's my birthday, my love, and I want it," said Smeagol. ' "I don't care," said Deagol. "I have given you a present already, more than I could afford. I found this, and I'm going to keep it." ' "Oh, are you indeed, my love," said Smeagol; and he caught Deagol by the throat and strangled him, because the gold looked so bright and beautiful. Then he put the ring on his finger. 'No one ever found out what had become of Deagol; he was murdered far from home, and his body was cunningly hidden. But Smeagol returned alone; and he found that none of his family could see him, when he was wearing the ring. He was very pleased with his discovery and he concealed it; and he used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all

that was hurtful. The ring had given him power according to his stature. It is not to be wondered at that he became very unpopular and was shunned (when visible) by all his relations. They kicked him, and he bit their feet. He took to thieving, and going about muttering to himself, and gurgling in his throat. So they called him Gollum, and cursed him, and told him to go far away; and his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled him from the family and turned him out of her hole. 'He wandered in loneliness, weeping a little for the hardness of the world, and he journeyed up the River, till he came to a stream that flowed down from the mountains, and he went that way. He caught fish in deep pools with invisible fingers and ate them raw. One day it was very hot, and as he was bending over a pool, he felt a burning on the back of his head, and a dazzling light from the water pained his wet eyes. He wondered at it, for he had almost forgotten about the Sun. Then for the last time he looked up and shook his fist at her. 'But as he lowered his eyes, he saw far ahead the tops of the Misty Mountains, out of which the stream came. And he thought suddenly: "It would be cool and shady under those mountains. The Sun could not watch me there. The roots of those mountains must be roots indeed; there must be great secrets buried there which have not been discovered since the beginning". 'So he journeyed by night up into the highlands, and he found a little cave out of which the dark stream ran; and he wormed his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills, and vanished out of all knowledge. The Ring went into the shadows with him, and even the maker, when his power had begun to grow again, could learn nothing of it'. 'Gollum!' cried Frodo. 'Gollum? Do you mean that this is the very Gollum-creature that Bilbo met? How loathsome!' 'I think it is a sad story,' said the wizard, 'and it might have happened to others, even to some hobbits that I have known'. 'I can't believe that Gollum was connected with hobbits, however distantly,' said Frodo with some heat. 'What an abominable notion!' 'It is true all the same,' replied Gandalf. 'About their origins, at any rate, I know more than hobbits do themselves. And even Bilbo's story suggests the kinship. There was a great deal in the background of their minds and memories that was very similar. They understood one another remarkably well, very much better than a hobbit would understand, say, a Dwarf, or an Orc, or even an Elf. Think of the riddles they both knew, for one thing'. 'Yes,' said Frodo. 'Though other folks besides hobbits ask riddles, and of much the same sort. And hobbits don't cheat. Gollum meant to cheat all the time. He was just trying to put poor Bilbo off his guard. And I daresay it amused his wickedness to start a game which might end in providing him with an easy victim, but if he lost would not hurt him'. 'Only too true, I fear,' said Gandalf. 'But there was something else in it, I think, which you don't see yet. Even Gollum was not wholly ruined. He had proved tougher than even one of the Wise would have guessed – as a hobbit might. There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: light out of the past. It was actually pleasant, I think, to hear a kindly voice again, bringing up memories of wind, and trees, and sun on the grass, and such forgotten things. 'But that, of course, would only make the evil part of him angrier in the end – unless it could be conquered. Unless it could be cured'. Gandalf sighed. 'Alas! there is little hope of that for him. Yet not no hope. No, not though he possessed the Ring so long, almost as far back as he can remember. For it was long since he had worn it much: in the black darkness it was seldom needed. Certainly he had never "faded". He is thin and tough still. But the thing was eating up his mind, of course, and the torment had become almost unbearable. 'All the "great secrets" under the mountains had turned out to be just empty night: there was nothing more to find out, nothing worth doing, only nasty furtive eating and resentful remembering. He was altogether wretched. He hated the dark, and he hated light more: he hated everything, and the Ring most of

all'. 'What do you mean?' said Frodo. 'Surely the Ring was his Precious and the only thing he cared for? But if he hated it, why didn't he get rid of it, or go away and leave it?' 'You ought to begin to understand, Frodo, after all you have heard,' said Gandalf. 'He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter. 'A Ring of Power looks after itself, Frodo. It may slip off treacherously, but its keeper never abandons it. At most he plays with the idea of handing it on to someone else's care – and that only at an early stage, when it first begins to grip. But as far as I know Bilbo alone in history has ever gone beyond playing, and really done it. He needed all my help, too. And even so he would never have just forsaken it, or cast it aside. It was not Gollum, Frodo, but the Ring itself that decided things. The Ring left him'. 'What, just in time to meet Bilbo?' said Frodo. 'Wouldn't an Orc have suited it better?' 'It is no laughing matter,' said Gandalf. 'Not for you. It was the strangest event in the whole history of the Ring so far: Bilbo's arrival just at that time, and putting his hand on it, blindly, in the dark. 'There was more than one power at work, Frodo. The Ring was trying to get back to its master. It had slipped from Isildur's hand and betrayed him; then when a chance came it caught poor De'agol, and he was murdered; and after that Gollum, and it had devoured him. It could make no further use of him: he was too small and mean; and as long as it stayed with him he would never leave his deep pool again. So now, when its master was awake once more and sending out his dark thought from Mirkwood, it abandoned Gollum. Only to be picked up by the most unlikely person imaginable: Bilbo from the Shire! 'Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought'. 'It is not,' said Frodo. 'Though I am not sure that I understand you. But how have you learned all this about the Ring, and about Gollum? Do you really know it all, or are you just guessing still?' Gandalf looked at Frodo, and his eyes glinted. 'I knew much and I have learned much,' he answered. 'But I am not going to give an account of all my doings to you. The history of Elendil and Isildur and the One Ring is known to all the Wise. Your ring is shown to be that One Ring by the fire-writing alone, apart from any other evidence'. 'And when did you discover that?' asked Frodo, interrupting. 'Just now in this room, of course,' answered the wizard sharply. 'But I expected to find it. I have come back from dark journeys and long search to make that final test. It is the last proof, and all is now only too clear. Making out Gollum's part, and fitting it into the gap in the history, required some thought. I may have started with guesses about Gollum, but I am not guessing now. I know. I have seen him'. 'You have seen Gollum?' exclaimed Frodo in amazement. 'Yes. The obvious thing to do, of course, if one could. I tried long ago; but I have managed it at last'. 'Then what happened after Bilbo escaped from him? Do you know that?' 'Not so clearly. What I have told you is what Gollum was willing to tell – though not, of course, in the way I have reported it. Gollum is a liar, and you have to sift his words. For instance, he called the Ring his "birthday-present", and he stuck to that. He said it came from his grandmother, who had lots of beautiful things of that kind. A ridiculous story. I have no doubt that Sme'agol's grandmother was a matriarch, a great person in her way, but to talk of her possessing many Elven-rings was absurd, and as for giving them away, it was a lie. But a lie with a grain of truth. 'The murder of De'agol haunted Gollum, and he had made up a defence, repeating it to his "Precious" over and over again, as he gnawed bones in the dark, until he almost believed it. It was his birthday. De'agol ought to have given the ring to him. It had obviously turned up just so as to be a present. It was his birthday-present, and so on, and on. 'I endured him as long as I could, but the truth was desperately

important, and in the end I had to be harsh. I put the fear of fire on him, and wrung the true story out of him, bit by bit, together with much snivelling and snarling. He thought he was misunderstood and ill-used. But when he had at last told me his history, as far as the end of the Riddle-game and Bilbo's escape, he would not say any more, except in dark hints. Some other fear was on him greater than mine. He muttered that he was going to get his own back. People would see if he would stand being kicked, and driven into a hole and then robbed. Gollum had good friends now, good friends and very strong. They would help him. Baggins would pay for it. That was his chief thought. He hated Bilbo and cursed his name. What is more, he knew where he came from'. 'But how did he find that out?' asked Frodo. 'Well, as for the name, Bilbo very foolishly told Gollum himself; and after that it would not be difficult to discover his country, once Gollum came out. Oh yes, he came out. His longing for the Ring proved stronger than his fear of the Orcs, or even of the light. After a year or two he left the mountains. You see, though still bound by desire of it, the Ring was no longer devouring him; he began to revive a little. He felt old, terribly old, yet less timid, and he was mortally hungry. 'Light, light of Sun and Moon, he still feared and hated, and he always will, I think; but he was cunning. He found he could hide from daylight and moonshine, and make his way swiftly and softly by dead of night with his pale cold eyes, and catch small frightened or unwary things. He grew stronger and bolder with new food and new air. He found his way into Mirkwood, as one would expect'. 'Is that where you found him?' asked Frodo. 'I saw him there,' answered Gandalf, 'but before that he had wandered far, following Bilbo's trail. It was difficult to learn anything from him for certain, for his talk was constantly interrupted by curses and threats. "What had it got in its pockets?"' he said. "It wouldn't say, no precious. Little cheat. Not a fair question. It cheated first, it did. It broke the rules. We ought to have squeezed it, yes precious. And we will, precious!"' 'That is a sample of his talk. I don't suppose you want any more. I had weary days of it. But from hints dropped among the snarls I gathered that his padding feet had taken him at last to Esgaroth, and even to the streets of Dale, listening secretly and peering. Well, the news of the great events went far and wide in Wilderland, and many had heard Bilbo's name and knew where he came from. We had made no secret of our return journey to his home in the West. Gollum's sharp ears would soon learn what he wanted'. 'Then why didn't he track Bilbo further?' asked Frodo. 'Why didn't he come to the Shire?' 'Ah,' said Gandalf, 'now we come to it. I think Gollum tried to. He set out and came back westward, as far as the Great River. But then he turned aside. He was not daunted by the distance, I am sure. No, something else drew him away. So my friends think, those that hunted him for me. 'The Wood-elves tracked him first, an easy task for them, for his trail was still fresh then. Through Mirkwood and back again it led them, though they never caught him. The wood was full of the rumour of him, dreadful tales even among beasts and birds. The Woodmen said that there was some new terror abroad, a ghost that drank blood. It climbed trees to find nests; it crept into holes to find the young; it slipped through windows to find cradles. 'But at the western edge of Mirkwood the trail turned away. It wandered off southwards and passed out of the Wood-elves' ken, and was lost. And then I made a great mistake. Yes, Frodo, and not the first; though I fear it may prove the worst. I let the matter be. I let him go; for I had much else to think of at that time, and I still trusted the lore of Saruman. 'Well, that was years ago. I have paid for it since with many dark and dangerous days. The trail was long cold when I took it up again, after Bilbo left here. And my search would have been in vain, but for the help that I had from a friend: Aragorn, the greatest traveller and huntsman of this age of the world. Together we sought for Gollum down the whole length of Wilderland, without hope, and without

success. But at last, when I had given up the chase and turned to other paths, Gollum was found. My friend returned out of great perils bringing the miserable creature with him. 'What he had been doing he would not say. He only wept and called us cruel, with many a gollum in his throat; and when we pressed him he whined and cringed, and rubbed his long hands, licking his fingers as if they pained him, as if he remembered some old torture. But I am afraid there is no possible doubt: he had made his slow, sneaking way, step by step, mile by mile, south, down at last to the Land of Mordor'. A heavy silence fell in the room. Frodo could hear his heart beating. Even outside everything seemed still. No sound of Sam's shears could now be heard. 'Yes, to Mordor,' said Gandalf. 'Alas! Mordor draws all wicked things, and the Dark Power was bending all its will to gather them there. The Ring of the Enemy would leave its mark, too, leave him open to the summons. And all folk were whispering then of the new Shadow in the South, and its hatred of the West. There were his fine new friends, who would help him in his revenge! 'Wretched fool! In that land he would learn much, too much for his comfort. And sooner or later as he lurked and pried on the borders he would be caught, and taken – for examination. That was the way of it, I fear. When he was found he had already been there long, and was on his way back. On some errand of mischief. But that does not matter much now. His worst mischief was done. 'Yes, alas! through him the Enemy has learned that the One has been found again. He knows where Isildur fell. He knows where Gollum found his ring. He knows that it is a Great Ring, for it gave long life. He knows that it is not one of the Three, for they have never been lost, and they endure no evil. He knows that it is not one of the Seven, or the Nine, for they are accounted for. He knows that it is the One. And he has at last heard, I think, of hobbits and the Shire. 'The Shire – he may be seeking for it now, if he has not already found out where it lies. Indeed, Frodo, I fear that he may even think that the long-unnnoticed name of Baggins has become important'. 'But this is terrible!' cried Frodo. 'Far worse than the worst that I imagined from your hints and warnings. O Gandalf, best of friends, what am I to do? For now I am really afraid. What am I to do? What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!' 'Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity'. 'I am sorry,' said Frodo. 'But I am frightened; and I do not feel any pity for Gollum'. 'You have not seen him,' Gandalf broke in. 'No, and I don't want to,' said Frodo. 'I can't understand you. Do you mean to say that you, and the Elves, have let him live on after all those horrible deeds? Now at any rate he is as bad as an Orc, and just an enemy. He deserves death'. 'Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many – yours not least. In any case we did not kill him: he is very old and very wretched. The Wood-elves have him in prison, but they treat him with such kindness as they can find in their wise hearts'. 'All the same,' said Frodo, 'even if Bilbo could not kill Gollum, I wish he had not kept the Ring. I wish he had never found it, and that I had not got it! Why did you let me keep it? Why didn't you make me throw it away, or, or destroy it?' 'Let you? Make you?' said the wizard. 'Haven't you been listening to all that I have said? You are not thinking of what you are saying. But as for throwing it away, that was obviously wrong. These Rings have a way of being found. In evil hands it might have

done great evil. Worst of all, it might have fallen into the hands of the Enemy. Indeed it certainly would; for this is the One, and he is exerting all his power to find it or draw it to himself. 'Of course, my dear Frodo, it was dangerous for you; and that has troubled me deeply. But there was so much at stake that I had to take some risk – though even when I was far away there has never been a day when the Shire has not been guarded by watchful eyes. As long as you never used it, I did not think that the Ring would have any lasting effect on you, not for evil, not at any rate for a very long time. And you must remember that nine years ago, when I last saw you, I still knew little for certain'. 'But why not destroy it, as you say should have been done long ago?' cried Frodo again. 'If you had warned me, or even sent me a message, I would have done away with it'. 'Would you? How would you do that? Have you ever tried?' 'No. But I suppose one could hammer it or melt it'. 'Try!' said Gandalf. 'Try now!' Frodo drew the Ring out of his pocket again and looked at it. It now appeared plain and smooth, without mark or device that he could see. The gold looked very fair and pure, and Frodo thought how rich and beautiful was its colour, how perfect was its roundness. It was an admirable thing and altogether precious. When he took it out he had intended to fling it from him into the very hottest part of the fire. But he found now that he could not do so, not without a great struggle. He weighed the Ring in his hand, hesitating, and forcing himself to remember all that Gandalf had told him; and then with an effort of will he made a movement, as if to cast it away – but he found that he had put it back in his pocket. Gandalf laughed grimly. 'You see? Already you too, Frodo, cannot easily let it go, nor will to damage it. And I could not "make" you – except by force, which would break your mind. But as for breaking the Ring, force is useless. Even if you took it and struck it with a heavy sledge-hammer, it would make no dint in it. It cannot be unmade by your hands, or by mine. 'Your small fire, of course, would not melt even ordinary gold. This Ring has already passed through it unscathed, and even unheated. But there is no smith's forge in this Shire that could change it at all. Not even the anvils and furnaces of the Dwarves could do that. It has been said that dragon-fire could melt and consume the Rings of Power, but there is not now any dragon left on earth in which the old fire is hot enough; nor was there ever any dragon, not even Ancalagon the Black, who could have harmed the One Ring, the Ruling Ring, for that was made by Sauron himself. 'There is only one way: to find the Cracks of Doom in the depths of Orodruin, the Fire-mountain, and cast the Ring in there, if you really wish to destroy it, to put it beyond the grasp of the Enemy for ever'. 'I do really wish to destroy it!' cried Frodo. 'Or, well, to have it destroyed. I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?' 'Such questions cannot be answered,' said Gandalf. 'You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have'. 'But I have so little of any of these things! You are wise and powerful. Will you not take the Ring?' 'No!' cried Gandalf, springing to his feet. 'With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly'. His eyes flashed and his face was lit as by a fire within. 'Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me'. He went to the window and drew aside the curtains and the shutters. Sunlight streamed back again into the room. Sam passed along the path outside whistling. 'And now,' said the wizard, turning back to Frodo, 'the decision lies with you. But I will always help you'. He laid his hand

on Frodo's shoulder. 'I will help you bear this burden, as long as it is yours to bear. But we must do something, soon. The Enemy is moving'. There was a long silence. Gandalf sat down again and puffed at his pipe, as if lost in thought. His eyes seemed closed, but under the lids he was watching Frodo intently. Frodo gazed fixedly at the red embers on the hearth, until they filled all his vision, and he seemed to be looking down into profound wells of fire. He was thinking of the fabled Cracks of Doom and the terror of the Fiery Mountain. 'Well!' said Gandalf at last. 'What are you thinking about? Have you decided what to do?' 'No!' answered Frodo, coming back to himself out of darkness, and finding to his surprise that it was not dark, and that out of the window he could see the sunlit garden. 'Or perhaps, yes. As far as I understand what you have said, I suppose I must keep the Ring and guard it, at least for the present, whatever it may do to me'. 'Whatever it may do, it will be slow, slow to evil, if you keep it with that purpose,' said Gandalf. 'I hope so,' said Frodo. 'But I hope that you may find some other better keeper soon. But in the meanwhile it seems that I am a danger, a danger to all that live near me. I cannot keep the Ring and stay here. I ought to leave Bag End, leave the Shire, leave everything and go away'. He sighed. 'I should like to save the Shire, if I could – though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid and dull for words, and have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them. But I don't feel like that now. I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again. 'Of course, I have sometimes thought of going away, but I imagined that as a kind of holiday, a series of adventures like Bilbo's or better, ending in peace. But this would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after me. And I suppose I must go alone, if I am to do that and save the Shire. But I feel very small, and very uprooted, and well – desperate. The Enemy is so strong and terrible'. He did not tell Gandalf, but as he was speaking a great desire to follow Bilbo flamed up in his heart – to follow Bilbo, and even perhaps to find him again. It was so strong that it overcame his fear: he could almost have run out there and then down the road without his hat, as Bilbo had done on a similar morning long ago. 'My dear Frodo!' exclaimed Gandalf. 'Hobbits really are amazing creatures, as I have said before. You can learn all that there is to know about their ways in a month, and yet after a hundred years they can still surprise you at a pinch. I hardly expected to get such an answer, not even from you. But Bilbo made no mistake in choosing his heir, though he little thought how important it would prove. I am afraid you are right. The Ring will not be able to stay hidden in the Shire much longer; and for your own sake, as well as for others, you will have to go, and leave the name of Baggins behind you. That name will not be safe to have, outside the Shire or in the Wild. I will give you a travelling name now. When you go, go as Mr Underhill. 'But I don't think you need go alone. Not if you know of anyone you can trust, and who would be willing to go by your side – and that you would be willing to take into unknown perils. But if you look for a companion, be careful in choosing! And be careful of what you say, even to your closest friends! The enemy has many spies and many ways of hearing'. Suddenly he stopped as if listening. Frodo became aware that all was very quiet, inside and outside. Gandalf crept to one side of the window. Then with a dart he sprang to the sill, and thrust a long arm out and downwards. There was a squawk, and up came Sam Gamgee's curly head hauled by one ear. 'Well, well, bless my beard!' said Gandalf. 'Sam Gamgee is it? Now what may you be doing?' 'Lor bless you, Mr Gandalf, sir!' said Sam. 'Nothing! Leastways I was just trimming the grass-border under the window, if you follow me'. He picked up his shears and exhibited them as evidence. 'I don't,' said Gandalf grimly. 'It is some time since I last heard the

sound of your shears. How long have you been eavesdropping?' 'Eavesdropping, sir? I don't follow you, begging your pardon. There ain't no eaves at Bag End, and that's a fact'. 'Don't be a fool! What have you heard, and why did you listen?' Gandalf's eyes flashed and his brows stuck out like bristles. 'Mr Frodo, sir!' cried Sam quaking. 'Don't let him hurt me, sir! Don't let him turn me into anything unnatural! My old dad would take on so. I meant no harm, on my honour, sir!' 'He won't hurt you,' said Frodo, hardly able to keep from laughing, although he was himself startled and rather puzzled. 'He knows, as well as I do, that you mean no harm. But just you up and answer his questions straight away!' 'Well, sir,' said Sam dithering a little. 'I heard a deal that I didn't rightly understand, about an enemy, and rings, and Mr Bilbo, sir, and dragons, and a fiery mountain, and – and Elves, sir. I listened because I couldn't help myself, if you know what I mean. Lor bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort. And I believe them too, whatever Ted may say. Elves, sir! I would dearly love to see them. Couldn't you take me to see Elves, sir, when you go?' Suddenly Gandalf laughed. 'Come inside!' he shouted, and putting out both his arms he lifted the astonished Sam, shears, grass-clippings and all, right through the window and stood him on the floor. 'Take you to see Elves, eh?' he said, eyeing Sam closely, but with a smile flickering on his face. 'So you heard that Mr Frodo is going away?' 'I did, sir. And that's why I choked: which you heard seemingly. I tried not to, sir, but it burst out of me: I was so upset'. 'It can't be helped, Sam,' said Frodo sadly. He had suddenly realized that flying from the Shire would mean more painful partings than merely saying farewell to the familiar comforts of Bag End. 'I shall have to go. But' – and here he looked hard at Sam – 'if you really care about me, you will keep that dead secret. See? If you don't, if you even breathe a word of what you've heard here, then I hope Gandalf will turn you into a spotted toad and fill the garden full of grass-snakes'. Sam fell on his knees, trembling. 'Get up, Sam!' said Gandalf. 'I have thought of something better than that. Something to shut your mouth, and punish you properly for listening. You shall go away with Mr Frodo!' 'Me, sir!' cried Sam, springing up like a dog invited for a walk. 'Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!' he shouted, and then burst into tears. Frodo woke suddenly. It was still dark in the room. Merry was standing there with a candle in one hand, and banging on the door with the other. 'All right! What is it?' said Frodo, still shaken and bewildered. 'What is it!' cried Merry. 'It is time to get up. It is half past four and very foggy. Come on! Sam is already getting breakfast ready. Even Pippin is up. I am just going to saddle the ponies, and fetch the one that is to be the baggage-carrier. Wake that sluggard Fatty! At least he must get up and see us off'. Soon after six o'clock the five hobbits were ready to start. Fatty Bolger was still yawning. They stole quietly out of the house. Merry went in front leading a laden pony, and took his way along a path that went through a spinney behind the house, and then cut across several fields. The leaves of trees were glistening, and every twig was dripping; the grass was grey with cold dew. Everything was still, and far-away noises seemed near and clear: fowls chattering in a yard, someone closing a door of a distant house. In their shed they found the ponies: sturdy little beasts of the kind loved by hobbits, not speedy, but good for a long day's work. They mounted, and soon they were riding off into the mist, which seemed to open reluctantly before them and close forbiddingly behind them. After riding for about an hour, slowly and without talking, they saw the Hedge looming suddenly ahead. It was tall and netted over with silver cobwebs. 'How are you going to get through this?' asked Fredegear. 'Follow me!' said Merry, 'and you will see'. He turned to the left along the Hedge, and soon they came to a point where it bent inwards, running along the lip of a hollow. A cutting had been made, at some distance from the Hedge, and went sloping gently down into the ground. It had walls of brick at the sides, which rose steadily, until

suddenly they arched over and formed a tunnel that dived deep under the Hedge and came out in the hollow on the other side. Here Fatty Bolger halted. 'Good-bye, Frodo!' he said. 'I wish you were not going into the Forest. I only hope you will not need rescuing before the day is out. But good luck to you – today and every day!' 'If there are no worse things ahead than , I shall be lucky,' said Frodo. 'Tell Gandalf to hurry along the East Road: we shall soon be back on it and going as fast as we can'. 'Good-bye!' they cried, and rode down the slope and disappeared from Fredegar's sight into the tunnel. It was dark and damp. At the far end it was closed by a gate of thick-set iron bars. Merry got down and unlocked the gate, and when they had all passed through he pushed it to again. It shut with a clang, and the lock clicked. The sound was ominous. 'There!' said Merry. 'You have left the Shire, and are now outside, and on the edge of '. 'Are the stories about it true?' asked Pippin. 'I don't know what stories you mean,' Merry answered. 'If you mean the old bogey-stories Fatty's nurses used to tell him, about goblins and wolves and things of that sort, I should say no. At any rate I don't believe them. But the Forest is queer. Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak, than things are in the Shire. And the trees do not like strangers. They watch you. They are usually content merely to watch you, as long as daylight lasts, and don't do much. Occasionally the most unfriendly ones may drop a branch, or stick a root out, or grasp at you with a long trailer. But at night things can be most alarming, or so I am told. I have only once or twice been in here after dark, and then only near the hedge. I thought all the trees were whispering to each other, passing news and plots along in an unintelligible language; and the branches swayed and groped without any wind. They do say the trees do actually move, and can surround strangers and hem them in. In fact long ago they attacked the Hedge: they came and planted themselves right by it, and leaned over it. But the hobbits came and cut down hundreds of trees, and made a great bonfire in the Forest, and burned all the ground in a long strip east of the Hedge. After that the trees gave up the attack, but they became very unfriendly. There is still a wide bare space not far inside where the bonfire was made'. 'Is it only the trees that are dangerous?' asked Pippin. 'There are various queer things living deep in the Forest, and on the far side,' said Merry, 'or at least I have heard so; but I have never seen any of them. But something makes paths. Whenever one comes inside one finds open tracks; but they seem to shift and change from time to time in a queer fashion. Not far from this tunnel there is, or was for a long time, the beginning of quite a broad path leading to the Bonfire Glade, and then on more or less in our direction, east and a little north. That is the path I am going to try and find'. The hobbits now left the tunnel-gate and rode across the wide hollow. On the far side was a faint path leading up on to the floor of the Forest, a hundred yards and more beyond the Hedge; but it vanished as soon as it brought them under the trees. Looking back they could see the dark line of the Hedge through the stems of trees that were already thick about them. Looking ahead they could see only tree-trunks of innumerable sizes and shapes: straight or bent, twisted, leaning, squat or slender, smooth or gnarled and branched; and all the stems were green or grey with moss and slimy, shaggy growths. Merry alone seemed fairly cheerful. 'You had better lead on and find that path,' Frodo said to him. 'Don't let us lose one another, or forget which way the Hedge lies!' They picked a way among the trees, and their ponies plodded along, carefully avoiding the many writhing and interlacing roots. There was no undergrowth. The ground was rising steadily, and as they went forward it seemed that the trees became taller, darker, and thicker. There was no sound, except an occasional drip of moisture falling through the still leaves. For the moment there was no whispering or movement among the branches; but they all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with dis-

approval, deepening to dislike and even enmity. The feeling steadily grew, until they found themselves looking up quickly, or glancing back over their shoulders, as if they expected a sudden blow. There was not as yet any sign of a path, and the trees seemed constantly to bar their way. Pippin suddenly felt that he could not bear it any longer, and without warning let out a shout. 'Oi! Oi!' he cried. 'I am not going to do anything. Just let me pass through, will you!' The others halted startled; but the cry fell as if muffled by a heavy curtain. There was no echo or answer though the wood seemed to become more crowded and more watchful than before. 'I should not shout, if I were you,' said Merry. 'It does more harm than good'. Frodo began to wonder if it were possible to find a way through, and if he had been right to make the others come into this abominable wood. Merry was looking from side to side, and seemed already uncertain which way to go. Pippin noticed it. 'It has not taken you long to lose us,' he said. But at that moment Merry gave a whistle of relief and pointed ahead. 'Well, well!' he said. 'These trees do shift. There is the Bonfire Glade in front of us (or I hope so), but the path to it seems to have moved away!' The light grew clearer as they went forward. Suddenly they came out of the trees and found themselves in a wide circular space. There was sky above them, blue and clear to their surprise, for down under the Forest-roof they had not been able to see the rising morning and the lifting of the mist. The sun was not, however, high enough yet to shine down into the clearing, though its light was on the tree-tops. The leaves were all thicker and greener about the edges of the glade, enclosing it with an almost solid wall. No tree grew there, only rough grass and many tall plants: stalky and faded hem-locks and wood-parsley, fire-weed seeding into fluffy ashes, and rampant nettles and thistles. A dreary place: but it seemed a charming and cheerful garden after the close Forest. The hobbits felt encouraged, and looked up hopefully at the broadening daylight in the sky. At the far side of the glade there was a break in the wall of trees, and a clear path beyond it. They could see it running on into the wood, wide in places and open above, though every now and again the trees drew in and overshadowed it with their dark boughs. Up this path they rode. They were still climbing gently, but they now went much quicker, and with better heart; for it seemed to them that the Forest had relented, and was going to let them pass unhindered after all. But after a while the air began to get hot and stuffy. The trees drew close again on either side, and they could no longer see far ahead. Now stronger than ever they felt again the ill will of the wood pressing on them. So silent was it that the fall of their ponies' hoofs, rustling on dead leaves and occasionally stumbling on hidden roots, seemed to thud in their ears. Frodo tried to sing a song to encourage them, but his voice sank to a murmur. O! Wanderers in the shadowed land despair not! For though dark they stand, all woods there be must end at last, and see the open sun go past: the setting sun, the rising sun, the day's end, or the day begun. For east or west all woods must fail . . . Fail – even as he said the word his voice faded into silence. The air seemed heavy and the making of words wearisome. Just behind them a large branch fell from an old overhanging tree with a crash into the path. The trees seemed to close in before them. 'They do not like all that about ending and failing,' said Merry. 'I should not sing any more at present. Wait till we do get to the edge, and then we'll turn and give them a rousing chorus!' He spoke cheerfully, and if he felt any great anxiety, he did not show it. The others did not answer. They were depressed. A heavy weight was settling steadily on Frodo's heart, and he regretted now with every step forward that he had ever thought of challenging the menace of the trees. He was, indeed, just about to stop and propose going back (if that was still possible), when things took a new turn. The path stopped climbing, and became for a while nearly level. The dark trees drew aside, and ahead they could see the path going almost straight forward. Before them, but some distance off, there stood a

green hill-top, treeless, rising like a bald head out of the encircling wood. The path seemed to be making directly for it. They now hurried forward again, delighted with the thought of climbing out for a while above the roof of the Forest. The path dipped, and then again began to climb upwards, leading them at last to the foot of the steep hillside. There it left the trees and faded into the turf. The wood stood all round the hill like thick hair that ended sharply in a circle round a shaven crown. The hobbits led their ponies up, winding round and round until they reached the top. There they stood and gazed about them. The air was gleaming and sunlit, but hazy; and they could not see to any great distance. Near at hand the mist was now almost gone; though here and there it lay in hollows of the wood, and to the south of them, out of a deep fold cutting right across the Forest, the fog still rose like steam or wisps of white smoke. 'That,' said Merry, pointing with his hand, 'that is the line of the Withywindle. It comes down out of the Downs and flows south-west through the midst of the Forest to join the Brandywine below Haysend. We don't want to go that way! The Withywindle valley is said to be the queerest part of the whole wood – the centre from which all the queerness comes, as it were'. The others looked in the direction that Merry pointed out, but they could see little but mists over the damp and deep-cut valley; and beyond it the southern half of the Forest faded from view. The sun on the hill-top was now getting hot. It must have been about eleven o'clock; but the autumn haze still prevented them from seeing much in other directions. In the west they could not make out either the line of the Hedge or the valley of the Brandywine beyond it. Northward, where they looked most hopefully, they could see nothing that might be the line of the great East Road, for which they were making. They were on an island in a sea of trees, and the horizon was veiled. On the south-eastern side the ground fell very steeply, as if the slopes of the hill were continued far down under the trees, like island-shores that really are the sides of a mountain rising out of deep waters. They sat on the green edge and looked out over the woods below them, while they ate their mid-day meal. As the sun rose and passed noon they glimpsed far off in the east the grey-green lines of the Downs that lay beyond on that side. That cheered them greatly; for it was good to see a sight of anything beyond the wood's borders, though they did not mean to go that way, if they could help it: the Barrow-downs had as sinister a reputation in hobbit-legend as the Forest itself. At length they made up their minds to go on again. The path that had brought them to the hill reappeared on the north-ward side; but they had not followed it far before they became aware that it was bending steadily to the right. Soon it began to descend rapidly and they guessed that it must actually be heading towards the Withywindle valley: not at all the direction they wished to take. After some discussion they decided to leave this misleading path and strike northward; for although they had not been able to see it from the hill-top, the Road must lie that way, and it could not be many miles off. Also northward, and to the left of the path, the land seemed to be drier and more open, climbing up to slopes where the trees were thinner, and pines and firs replaced the oaks and ashes and other strange and nameless trees of the denser wood. At first their choice seemed to be good: they got along at a fair speed, though whenever they got a glimpse of the sun in an open glade they seemed unaccountably to have veered eastwards. But after a time the trees began to close in again, just where they had appeared from a distance to be thinner and less tangled. Then deep folds in the ground were discovered unexpectedly, like the ruts of great giant-wheels or wide moats and sunken roads long disused and choked with brambles. These lay usually right across their line of march, and could only be crossed by scrambling down and out again, which was troublesome and difficult with their ponies. Each time they climbed down they found the hollow filled with thick bushes and matted undergrowth, which somehow would not yield to the

left, but only gave way when they turned to the right; and they had to go some distance along the bottom before they could find a way up the further bank. Each time they clambered out, the trees seemed deeper and darker; and always to the left and upwards it was most difficult to find a way, and they were forced to the right and downwards. After an hour or two they had lost all clear sense of direction, though they knew well enough that they had long ceased to go northward at all. They were being headed off, and were simply following a course chosen for them – eastwards and southwards, into the heart of the Forest and not out of it. The afternoon was wearing away when they scrambled and stumbled into a fold that was wider and deeper than any they had yet met. It was so steep and overhung that it proved impossible to climb out of it again, either forwards or backwards, without leaving their ponies and their baggage behind. All they could do was to follow the fold – downwards. The ground grew soft, and in places boggy; springs appeared in the banks, and soon they found themselves following a brook that trickled and babbled through a weedy bed. Then the ground began to fall rapidly, and the brook growing strong and noisy, flowed and leaped swiftly downhill. They were in a deep dim-lit gully over-arched by trees high above them. After stumbling along for some way along the stream, they came quite suddenly out of the gloom. As if through a gate they saw the sunlight before them. Coming to the opening they found that they had made their way down through a cleft in a high steep bank, almost a cliff. At its feet was a wide space of grass and reeds; and in the distance could be glimpsed another bank almost as steep. A golden afternoon of late sunshine lay warm and drowsy upon the hidden land between. In the midst of it there wound lazily a dark river of brown water, bordered with ancient willows, arched over with willows, blocked with fallen willows, and flecked with thousands of faded willow-leaves. The air was thick with them, fluttering yellow from the branches; for there was a warm and gentle breeze blowing softly in the valley, and the reeds were rustling, and the willow-boughs were creaking. ‘Well, now I have at least some notion of where we are!’ said Merry. ‘We have come almost in the opposite direction to which we intended. This is the River Withywindle! I will go on and explore’. He passed out into the sunshine and disappeared into the long grasses. After a while he reappeared, and reported that there was fairly solid ground between the cliff-foot and the river; in some places firm turf went down to the water’s edge. ‘What’s more,’ he said, ‘there seems to be something like a footpath winding along on this side of the river. If we turn left and follow it, we shall be bound to come out on the east side of the Forest eventually’. ‘I dare say!’ said Pippin. ‘That is, if the track goes on so far, and does not simply lead us into a bog and leave us there. Who made the track, do you suppose, and why? I am sure it was not for our benefit. I am getting very suspicious of this Forest and everything in it, and I begin to believe all the stories about it. And have you any idea how far eastward we should have to go?’ ‘No,’ said Merry, ‘I haven’t. I don’t know in the least how far down the Withywindle we are, or who could possibly come here often enough to make a path along it. But there is no other way out that I can see or think of’. There being nothing else for it, they filed out, and Merry led them to the path that he had discovered. Everywhere the reeds and grasses were lush and tall, in places far above their heads; but once found, the path was easy to follow, as it turned and twisted, picking out the sounder ground among the bogs and pools. Here and there it passed over other rills, running down gullies into the Withywindle out of the higher forest-lands, and at these points there were tree-trunks or bundles of brushwood laid carefully across. The hobbits began to feel very hot. There were armies of flies of all kinds buzzing round their ears, and the afternoon sun was burning on their backs. At last they came suddenly into a thin shade; great grey branches reached across the path. Each step forward became more reluctant than the

last. Sleepiness seemed to be creeping out of the ground and up their legs, and falling softly out of the air upon their heads and eyes. Frodo felt his chin go down and his head nod. Just in front of him Pippin fell forward on to his knees. Frodo halted. 'It's no good,' he heard Merry saying. 'Can't go another step without rest. Must have nap. It's cool under the willows. Less flies!' Frodo did not like the sound of this. 'Come on!' he cried. 'We can't have a nap yet. We must get clear of the Forest first'. But the others were too far gone to care. Beside them Sam stood yawning and blinking stupidly. Suddenly Frodo himself felt sleep overwhelming him. His head swam. There now seemed hardly a sound in the air. The flies had stopped buzzing. Only a gentle noise on the edge of hearing, a soft fluttering as of a song half whispered, seemed to stir in the boughs above. He lifted his heavy eyes and saw leaning over him a huge willow-tree, old and hoary. Enormous it looked, its sprawling branches going up like reaching arms with many long-fingered hands, its knotted and twisted trunk gaping in wide fissures that creaked faintly as the boughs moved. The leaves fluttering against the bright sky dazzled him, and he toppled over, lying where he fell upon the grass. Merry and Pippin dragged themselves forward and lay down with their backs to the willow-trunk. Behind them the great cracks gaped wide to receive them as the tree swayed and creaked. They looked up at the grey and yellow leaves, moving softly against the light, and singing. They shut their eyes, and then it seemed that they could almost hear words, cool words, saying something about water and sleep. They gave themselves up to the spell and fell fast asleep at the foot of the great grey willow. Frodo lay for a while fighting with the sleep that was overpowering him; then with an effort he struggled to his feet again. He felt a compelling desire for cool water. 'Wait for me, Sam,' he stammered. 'Must bathe feet a minute'. Half in a dream he wandered forward to the riverward side of the tree, where great winding roots grew out into the stream, like gnarled dragonets straining down to drink. He straddled one of these, and paddled his hot feet in the cool brown water; and there he too suddenly fell asleep with his back against the tree. Sam sat down and scratched his head, and yawned like a cavern. He was worried. The afternoon was getting late, and he thought this sudden sleepiness uncanny. 'There's more behind this than sun and warm air,' he muttered to himself. 'I don't like this great big tree. I don't trust it. Hark at it singing about sleep now! This won't do at all!' He pulled himself to his feet, and staggered off to see what had become of the ponies. He found that two had wandered on a good way along the path; and he had just caught them and brought them back towards the others, when he heard two noises; one loud, and the other soft but very clear. One was the splash of something heavy falling into the water; the other was a noise like the snick of a lock when a door quietly closes fast. He rushed back to the bank. Frodo was in the water close to the edge, and a great tree-root seemed to be over him and holding him down, but he was not struggling. Sam gripped him by the jacket, and dragged him from under the root; and then with difficulty hauled him on to the bank. Almost at once he woke, and coughed and spluttered. 'Do you know, Sam,' he said at length, 'the beastly tree threw me in! I felt it. The big root just twisted round and tipped me in!' 'You were dreaming I expect, Mr Frodo,' said Sam. 'You shouldn't sit in such a place, if you feel sleepy'. 'What about the others?' Frodo asked. 'I wonder what sort of dreams they are having'. They went round to the other side of the tree, and then Sam understood the click that he had heard. Pippin had vanished. The crack by which he had laid himself had closed together, so that not a chink could be seen. Merry was trapped: another crack had closed about his waist; his legs lay outside, but the rest of him was inside a dark opening, the edges of which gripped like a pair of pincers. Frodo and Sam beat first upon the tree-trunk where Pippin had lain. They then struggled frantically to pull open the jaws of the crack that held poor Merry. It was quite useless.

‘What a foul thing to happen!’ cried Frodo wildly. ‘Why did we ever come into this dreadful Forest? I wish we were all back at Crickhollow!’ He kicked the tree with all his strength, heedless of his own feet. A hardly perceptible shiver ran through the stem and up into the branches; the leaves rustled and whispered, but with a sound now of faint and far-off laughter. ‘I suppose we haven’t got an axe among our luggage, Mr Frodo?’ asked Sam. ‘I brought a little hatchet for chopping firewood,’ said Frodo. ‘That wouldn’t be much use’. ‘Wait a minute!’ cried Sam, struck by an idea suggested by firewood. ‘We might do something with fire!’ ‘We might,’ said Frodo doubtfully. ‘We might succeed in roasting Pippin alive inside’. ‘We might try to hurt or frighten this tree to begin with,’ said Sam fiercely. ‘If it don’t let them go, I’ll have it down, if I have to gnaw it’. He ran to the ponies and before long came back with two tinder-boxes and a hatchet. Quickly they gathered dry grass and leaves, and bits of bark; and made a pile of broken twigs and chopped sticks. These they heaped against the trunk on the far side of the tree from the prisoners. As soon as Sam had struck a spark into the tinder, it kindled the dry grass and a flurry of flame and smoke went up. The twigs crackled. Little fingers of fire licked against the dry scored rind of the ancient tree and scorched it. A tremor ran through the whole willow. The leaves seemed to hiss above their heads with a sound of pain and anger. A loud scream came from Merry, and from far inside the tree they heard Pippin give a muffled yell. ‘Put it out! Put it out!’ cried Merry. ‘He’ll squeeze me in two, if you don’t. He says so!’ ‘Who? What?’ shouted Frodo, rushing round to the other side of the tree. ‘Put it out! Put it out!’ begged Merry. The branches of the willow began to sway violently. There was a sound as of a wind rising and spreading outwards to the branches of all the other trees round about, as though they had dropped a stone into the quiet slumber of the river-valley and set up ripples of anger that ran out over the whole Forest. Sam kicked at the little fire and stamped out the sparks. But Frodo, without any clear idea of why he did so, or what he hoped for, ran along the path crying help! help! help! It seemed to him that he could hardly hear the sound of his own shrill voice: it was blown away from him by the willow-wind and drowned in a clamour of leaves, as soon as the words left his mouth. He felt desperate: lost and witless. Suddenly he stopped. There was an answer, or so he thought; but it seemed to come from behind him, away down the path further back in the Forest. He turned round and listened, and soon there could be no doubt: someone was singing a song; a deep glad voice was singing carelessly and happily, but it was singing nonsense: Hey dol! merry dol! ring a dong dillo! Ring a dong! hop along! fal lal the willow! Tom Bom, jolly Tom, Tom Bombadillo! Half hopeful and half afraid of some new danger, Frodo and Sam now both stood still. Suddenly out of a long string of nonsense-words (or so they seemed) the voice rose up loud and clear and burst into this song: Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! My darling! Light goes the weather-wind and the feathered starling. Down along under Hill, shining in the sunlight, Waiting on the doorstep for the cold starlight, There my pretty lady is, River-woman’s daughter, Slender as the willow-wand, clearer than the water. Old Tom Bombadil water-lilies bringing Comes hopping home again. Can you hear him singing? Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! and merry-o, Goldberry, Goldberry, merry yellow berry-o! Poor old Willow-man, you tuck your roots away! Tom’s in a hurry now. Evening will follow day. Tom’s going home again water-lilies bringing. Hey! Come derry dol! Can you hear me singing? Frodo and Sam stood as if enchanted. The wind puffed out. The leaves hung silently again on stiff branches. There was another burst of song, and then suddenly, hopping and dancing along the path, there appeared above the reeds an old battered hat with a tall crown and a long blue feather stuck in the band. With another hop and a bound there came into view a man, or so it seemed. At any rate he was too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not quite tall enough for

one of the Big People, though he made noise enough for one, stumping along with great yellow boots on his thick legs, and charging through grass and rushes like a cow going down to drink. He had a blue coat and a long brown beard; his eyes were blue and bright, and his face was red as a ripe apple, but creased into a hundred wrinkles of laughter. In his hands he carried on a large leaf as on a tray a small pile of white water-lilies. 'Help!' cried Frodo and Sam running towards him with their hands stretched out. 'Whoa! Whoa! steady there!' cried the old man, holding up one hand, and they stopped short, as if they had been struck stiff. 'Now, my little fellows, where be you a-going to, puffing like a bellows? What's the matter here then? Do you know who I am? I'm Tom Bombadil. Tell me what's your trouble! Tom's in a hurry now. Don't you crush my lilies!' 'My friends are caught in the willow-tree,' cried Frodo breathlessly. 'Master Merry's being squeezed in a crack!' cried Sam. 'What?' shouted Tom Bombadil, leaping up in the air. 'Old Man Willow? Naught worse than that, eh? That can soon be mended. I know the tune for him. Old grey Willow-man! I'll freeze his marrow cold, if he don't behave himself. I'll sing his roots off. I'll sing a wind up and blow leaf and branch away. Old Man Willow!' Setting down his lilies carefully on the grass, he ran to the tree. There he saw Merry's feet still sticking out – the rest had already been drawn further inside. Tom put his mouth to the crack and began singing into it in a low voice. They could not catch the words, but evidently Merry was aroused. His legs began to kick. Tom sprang away, and breaking off a hanging branch smote the side of the willow with it. 'You let them out again, Old Man Willow!' he said. 'What be you a-thinking of? You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep! Bombadil is talking!' He then seized Merry's feet and drew him out of the suddenly widening crack. There was a tearing creak and the other crack split open, and out of it Pippin sprang, as if he had been kicked. Then with a loud snap both cracks closed fast again. A shudder ran through the tree from root to tip, and complete silence fell. 'Thank you!' said the hobbits, one after the other. Tom Bombadil burst out laughing. 'Well, my little fellows!' said he, stooping so that he peered into their faces. 'You shall come home with me! The table is all laden with yellow cream, honeycomb, and white bread and butter. Goldberry is waiting. Time enough for questions around the supper table. You follow after me as quick as you are able!' With that he picked up his lilies, and then with a beckoning wave of his hand went hopping and dancing along the path eastward, still singing loudly and nonsensically. Too surprised and too relieved to talk, the hobbits followed after him as fast as they could. But that was not fast enough. Tom soon disappeared in front of them, and the noise of his singing got fainter and further away. Suddenly his voice came floating back to them in a loud halloo! Hop along, my little friends, up the Withywindle! Tom's going on ahead candles for to kindle. Down west sinks the Sun: soon you will be groping. When the night-shadows fall, then the door will open, Out of the window-panes light will twinkle yellow. Fear no alder black! Heed no hoary willow! Fear neither root nor bough! Tom goes on before you. Hey now! merry dol! We'll be waiting for you! After that the hobbits heard no more. Almost at once the sun seemed to sink into the trees behind them. They thought of the slanting light of evening glittering on the Brandywine River, and the windows of Bucklebury beginning to gleam with hundreds of lights. Great shadows fell across them; trunks and branches of trees hung dark and threatening over the path. White mists began to rise and curl on the surface of the river and stray about the roots of the trees upon its borders. Out of the very ground at their feet a shadowy steam arose and mingled with the swiftly falling dusk. It became difficult to follow the path, and they were very tired. Their legs seemed leaden. Strange furtive noises ran among the bushes and reeds on either side of them; and if they looked up to the pale sky, they caught sight of queer gnarled and

knobbly faces that gloomed dark against the twilight, and leered down at them from the high bank and the edges of the wood. They began to feel that all this country was unreal, and that they were stumbling through an ominous dream that led to no awakening. Just as they felt their feet slowing down to a standstill, they noticed that the ground was gently rising. The water began to murmur. In the darkness they caught the white glimmer of foam, where the river flowed over a short fall. Then suddenly the trees came to an end and the mists were left behind. They stepped out from the Forest, and found a wide sweep of grass welling up before them. The river, now small and swift, was leaping merrily down to meet them, glinting here and there in the light of the stars, which were already shining in the sky. The grass under their feet was smooth and short, as if it had been mown or shaven. The eaves of the Forest behind were clipped, and trim as a hedge. The path was now plain before them, well-tended and bordered with stone. It wound up on to the top of a grassy knoll, now grey under the pale starry night; and there, still high above them on a further slope, they saw the twinkling lights of a house. Down again the path went, and then up again, up a long smooth hillside of turf, towards the light. Suddenly a wide yellow beam flowed out brightly from a door that was opened. There was Tom Bombadil's house before them, up, down, under hill. Behind it a steep shoulder of the land lay grey and bare, and beyond that the dark shapes of the Barrow-downs stalked away into the eastern night. They all hurried forward, hobbits and ponies. Already half their weariness and all their fears had fallen from them. Hey! Come merry dol! rolled out the song to greet them. Hey! Come derry dol! Hop along, my hearties! Hobbits! Ponies all! We are fond of parties. Now let the fun begin! Let us sing together! Then another clear voice, as young and as ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning in the hills, came falling like silver to meet them: Now let the song begin! Let us sing together Of sun, stars, moon and mist, rain and cloudy weather, Light on the budding leaf, dew on the feather, Wind on the open hill, bells on the heather, Reeds by the shady pool, lilies on the water: Old Tom Bombadil and the River-daughter! And with that song the hobbits stood upon the threshold, and a golden light was all about them. The four hobbits stepped over the wide stone threshold, and stood still, blinking. They were in a long low room, filled with the light of lamps swinging from the beams of the roof; and on the table of dark polished wood stood many candles, tall and yellow, burning brightly. In a chair, at the far side of the room facing the outer door, sat a woman. Her long yellow hair rippled down her shoulders; her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew; and her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots. About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool. 'Enter, good guests!' she said, and as she spoke they knew that it was her clear voice they had heard singing. They came a few timid steps further into the room, and began to bow low, feeling strangely surprised and awkward, like folk that, knocking at a cottage door to beg for a drink of water, have been answered by a fair young elf-queen clad in living flowers. But before they could say anything, she sprang lightly up and over the lily-bowls, and ran laughing towards them; and as she ran her gown rustled softly like the wind in the flowering borders of a river. 'Come dear folk!' she said, taking Frodo by the hand. 'Laugh and be merry! I am Goldberry, daughter of the River'. Then lightly she passed them and closing the door she turned her back to it, with her white arms spread out across it. 'Let us shut out thenight!' she said. 'For you are still afraid, perhaps, of mist and tree-shadows and deep water, and untame things. Fear nothing! For tonight you are under the roof of Tom Bombadil'. The hobbits looked at her in wonder; and she looked at each of them and

smiled. 'Fair lady Goldberry!' said Frodo at last, feeling his heart moved with a joy that he did not understand. He stood as he had at times stood enchanted by fair elven-voices; but the spell that was now laid upon him was different: less keen and lofty was the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvellous and yet not strange. 'Fair lady Goldberry!' he said again. 'Now the joy that was hidden in the songs we heard is made plain to me. O slender as a willow-wand! O clearer than clear water! O reed by the living pool! Fair River-daughter! O spring-time and summer-time, and spring again after! O wind on the waterfall, and the leaves' laughter!' Suddenly he stopped and stammered, overcome with surprise to hear himself saying such things. But Goldberry laughed. 'Welcome!' she said. 'I had not heard that folk of the Shire were so sweet-tongued. But I see that you are an Elf-friend; the light in your eyes and the ring in your voice tells it. This is a merry meeting! Sit now, and wait for the Master of the house! He will not be long. He is tending your tired beasts'. The hobbits sat down gladly in low rush-seated chairs, while Goldberry busied herself about the table; and their eyes followed her, for the slender grace of her movement filled them with quiet delight. From somewhere behind the house came the sound of singing. Every now and again they caught, among many a derry dol and a merry dol and a ring a ding dillo the repeated words: Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow; Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow. 'Fair lady!' said Frodo again after a while. 'Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?' 'He is,' said Goldberry, staying her swift movements and smiling. Frodo looked at her questioningly. 'He is, as you have seen him,' she said in answer to his look. 'He is the Master of wood, water, and hill'. 'Then all this strange land belongs to him?' 'No indeed!' she answered, and her smile faded. 'That would indeed be a burden,' she added in a low voice, as if to herself. 'The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master. No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest, wading in the water, leaping on the hill-tops under light and shadow. He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master'. A door opened and in came Tom Bombadil. He had now no hat and his thick brown hair was crowned with autumn leaves. He laughed, and going to Goldberry, took her hand. 'Here's my pretty lady!' he said, bowing to the hobbits. 'Here's my Goldberry clothed all in silver-green with flowers in her girdle! Is the table laden? I see yellow cream and honeycomb, and white bread, and butter; milk, cheese, and green herbs and ripe berries gathered. Is that enough for us? Is the supper ready?' 'It is,' said Goldberry; 'but the guests perhaps are not?' Tom clapped his hands and cried: 'Tom, Tom! your guests are tired, and you had near forgotten! Come now, my merry friends, and Tom will refresh you! You shall clean grimy hands, and wash your weary faces; cast off your muddy cloaks and comb out your tangles!' He opened the door, and they followed him down a short passage and round a sharp turn. They came to a low room with a sloping roof (a penthouse, it seemed, built on to the north end of the house). Its walls were of clean stone, but they were mostly covered with green hanging mats and yellow curtains. The floor was flagged, and strewn with fresh green rushes. There were four deep mattresses, each piled with white blankets, laid on the floor along one side. Against the opposite wall was a long bench laden with wide earthenware basins, and beside it stood brown ewers filled with water, some cold, some steaming hot. There were soft green slippers set ready beside each bed. Before long, washed and refreshed, the hobbits were seated at the table, two on each side, while at either end sat Goldberry and the Master. It was a long and merry meal. Though the hobbits ate, as only famished hobbits can eat, there was no lack. The drink in their drinking-bowls seemed to be clear cold water, yet it went to their hearts like wine and set free their voices. The guests became suddenly aware that they were singing merrily, as if it was easier and more natural than talking.

At last Tom and Goldberry rose and cleared the table swiftly. The guests were commanded to sit quiet, and were set in chairs, each with a footstool to his tired feet. There was a fire in the wide hearth before them, and it was burning with a sweet smell, as if it were built of apple-wood. When everything was set in order, all the lights in the room were put out, except one lamp and a pair of candles at each end of the chimney-shelf. Then Goldberry came and stood before them, holding a candle; and she wished them each a good night and deep sleep. 'Have peace now,' she said, 'until the morning! Heed no nightly noises! For nothing passes door and window here save moonlight and starlight and the wind off the hill-top. Good night!' She passed out of the room with a glimmer and a rustle. The sound of her footsteps was like a stream falling gently away downhill over cool stones in the quiet of night. Tom sat on a while beside them in silence, while each of them tried to muster the courage to ask one of the many questions he had meant to ask at supper. Sleep gathered on their eyelids. At last Frodo spoke: 'Did you hear me calling, Master, or was it just chance that brought you at that moment?' Tom stirred like a man shaken out of a pleasant dream. 'Eh, what?' said he. 'Did I hear you calling? Nay, I did not hear: I was busy singing. Just chance brought me then, if chance you call it. It was no plan of mine, though I was waiting for you. We heard news of you, and learned that you were wandering. We guessed you'd come ere long down to the water: all paths lead that way, down to Withywindle. Old grey Willow-man, he's a mighty singer; and it's hard for little folk to escape his cunning mazes. But Tom had an errand there, that he dared not hinder'. Tom nodded as if sleep was taking him again; but he went on in a soft singing voice: I had an errand there: gathering water-lilies, green leaves and lilies white to please my pretty lady, the last ere the year's end to keep them from the winter, to flower by her pretty feet till the snows are melted. Each year at summer's end I go to find them for her, in a wide pool, deep and clear, far down Withywindle; there they open first in spring and there they linger latest. By that pool long ago I found the River-daughter, fair young Goldberry sitting in the rushes. Sweet was her singing then, and her heart was beating! He opened his eyes and looked at them with a sudden glint of blue: And that proved well for you – for now I shall no longer go down deep again along the forest-water, not while the year is old. Nor shall I be passing Old Man Willow's house this side of spring-time, not till the merry spring, when the River-daughter dances down the withy-path to bathe in the water. He fell silent again; but Frodo could not help asking one more question: the one he most desired to have answered. 'Tell us, Master,' he said, 'about the Willow-man. What is he? I have never heard of him before'. 'No, don't!' said Merry and Pippin together, sitting suddenly upright. 'Not now! Not until the morning!' 'That is right!' said the old man. 'Now is the time for resting. Some things are ill to hear when the world's in shadow. Sleep till the morning-light, rest on the pillow! Heed no nightly noise! Fear no grey willow!' And with that he took down the lamp and blew it out, and grasping a candle in either hand he led them out of the room. Their mattresses and pillows were soft as down, and the blankets were of white wool. They had hardly laid themselves on the deep beds and drawn the light covers over them before they were asleep. In the dead night, Frodo lay in a dream without light. Then he saw the young moon rising; under its thin light there loomed before him a black wall of rock, pierced by a dark arch like a great gate. It seemed to Frodo that he was lifted up, and passing over he saw that the rock-wall was a circle of hills, and that within it was a plain, and in the midst of the plain stood a pinnacle of stone, like a vast tower but not made by hands. On its top stood the figure of a man. The moon as it rose seemed to hang for a moment above his head and glistened in his white hair as the wind stirred it. Up from the dark plain below came the crying of fell voices, and the howling of many wolves. Suddenly a shadow, like the shape of

great wings, passed across the moon. The figure lifted his arms and a light flashed from the staff that he wielded. A mighty eagle swept down and bore him away. The voices wailed and the wolves yammered. There was a noise like a strong wind blowing, and on it was borne the sound of hoofs, galloping, galloping, galloping from the East. 'Black Riders!' thought Frodo as he wakened, with the sound of the hoofs still echoing in his mind. He wondered if he would ever again have the courage to leave the safety of these stone walls. He lay motionless, still listening; but all was now silent, and at last he turned and fell asleep again or wandered into some other unremembered dream. At his side Pippin lay dreaming pleasantly; but a change came over his dreams and he turned and groaned. Suddenly he woke, or thought he had waked, and yet still heard in the darkness the sound that had disturbed his dream: tip-tap, squeak: the noise was like branches fretting in the wind, twig-fingers scraping wall and window: creak, creak, creak. He wondered if there were willow-trees close to the house; and then suddenly he had a dreadful feeling that he was not in an ordinary house at all, but inside the willow and listening to that horrible dry creaking voice laughing at him again. He sat up, and felt the soft pillows yield to his hands, and he lay down again relieved. He seemed to hear the echo of words in his ears: 'Fear nothing! Have peace until the morning! Heed no nightly noises!' Then he went to sleep again. It was the sound of water that Merry heard falling into his quiet sleep: water streaming down gently, and then spreading, spreading irresistibly all round the house into a dark shoreless pool. It gurgled under the walls, and was rising slowly but surely. 'I shall be drowned!' he thought. 'It will find its way in, and then I shall drown'. He felt that he was lying in a soft slimy bog, and springing up he set his foot on the corner of a cold hard flagstone. Then he remembered where he was and lay down again. He seemed to hear or remember hearing: 'Nothing passes doors or windows save moonlight and star-light and the wind off the hill-top'. A little breath of sweet air moved the curtain. He breathed deep and fell asleep again. As far as he could remember, Sam slept through the night in deep content, if logs are contented. They woke up, all four at once, in the morning light. Tom was moving about the room whistling like a starling. When he heard them stir he clapped his hands, and cried: 'Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! My hearties!' He drew back the yellow curtains, and the hobbits saw that these had covered the windows, at either end of the room, one looking east and the other looking west. They leapt up refreshed. Frodo ran to the eastern window, and found himself looking into a kitchen-garden grey with dew. He had half expected to see turf right up to the walls, turf all pocked with hoof-prints. Actually his view was screened by a tall line of beans on poles; but above and far beyond them the grey top of the hill loomed up against the sunrise. It was a pale morning: in the East, behind long clouds like lines of soiled wool stained red at the edges, lay glimmering deeps of yellow. The sky spoke of rain to come; but the light was broadening quickly, and the red flowers on the beans began to glow against the wet green leaves. Pippin looked out of the western window, down into a pool of mist. The Forest was hidden under a fog. It was like looking down on to a sloping cloud-roof from above. There was a fold or channel where the mist was broken into many plumes and billows: the valley of the Withywindle. The stream ran down the hill on the left and vanished into the white shadows. Near at hand was a flower-garden and a clipped hedge silver-netted, and beyond that grey shaven grass pale with dew-drops. There was no willow-tree to be seen. 'Good morning, merry friends!' cried Tom, opening the eastern window wide. A cool air flowed in; it had a rainy smell. 'Sun won't show her face much today, I'm thinking. I have been walking wide, leaping on the hill-tops, since the grey dawn began, nosing wind and weather, wet grass underfoot, wet sky above me. I wakened Goldberry singing under window; but naught wakes hobbit-folk in the early

morning. In the night little folk wake up in the darkness, and sleep after light has come! Ring a ding dillo! Wake now, my merry friends! Forget the nightly noises! Ring a ding dillo del! derry del, my hearties! If you come soon you'll find breakfast on the table. If you come late you'll get grass and rain-water!' Needless to say – not that Tom's threat sounded very serious – the hobbits came soon, and left the table late and only when it was beginning to look rather empty. Neither Tom nor Goldberry were there. Tom could be heard about the house, clattering in the kitchen, and up and down the stairs, and singing here and there outside. The room looked westward over the mist-clouded valley, and the window was open. Water dripped down from the thatched eaves above. Before they had finished breakfast the clouds had joined into an unbroken roof, and a straight grey rain came softly and steadily down. Behind its deep curtain the Forest was completely veiled. As they looked out of the window there came falling gently as if it was flowing down the rain out of the sky, the clear voice of Goldberry singing up above them. They could hear few words, but it seemed plain to them that the song was a rain-song, as sweet as showers on dry hills, that told the tale of a river from the spring in the highlands to the Sea far below. The hobbits listened with delight; and Frodo was glad in his heart, and blessed the kindly weather, because it delayed them from departing. The thought of going had been heavy upon him from the moment he awoke; but he guessed now that they would not go further that day. The upper wind settled in the West and deeper and wetter clouds rolled up to spill their laden rain on the bare heads of the Downs. Nothing could be seen all round the house but falling water. Frodo stood near the open door and watched the white chalky path turn into a little river of milk and go bubbling away down into the valley. Tom Bombadil came trotting round the corner of the house, waving his arms as if he was warding off the rain – and indeed when he sprang over the threshold he seemed quite dry, except for his boots. These he took off and put in the chimney-corner. Then he sat in the largest chair and called the hobbits to gather round him. 'This is Goldberry's washing day,' he said, 'and her autumn-cleaning. Too wet for hobbit-folk – let them rest while they are able! It's a good day for long tales, for questions and for answers, so Tom will start the talking'. He then told them many remarkable stories, sometimes half as if speaking to himself, sometimes looking at them suddenly with a bright blue eye under his deep brows. Often his voice would turn to song, and he would get out of his chair and dance about. He told them tales of bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and the strange creatures of the Forest, about the evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things, and secrets hidden under brambles. As they listened, they began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home. Moving constantly in and out of his talk was Old Man Willow, and Frodo learned now enough to content him, indeed more than enough, for it was not comfortable lore. Tom's words laid bare the hearts of trees and their thoughts, which were often dark and strange, and filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth, gnawing, biting, breaking, hacking, burning: destroyers and usurpers. It was not called the Old Forest without reason, for it was indeed ancient, a survivor of vast forgotten woods; and in it there lived yet, ageing no quicker than the hills, the fathers of the fathers of trees, remembering times when they were lords. The countless years had filled them with pride and rooted wisdom, and with malice. But none were more dangerous than the Great Willow: his heart was rotten, but his strength was green; and he was cunning, and a master of winds, and his song and thought ran through the woods on both sides of the river. His grey thirsty spirit drew power out of the earth and spread like fine root-threads in the ground, and invisible twig-fingers in the air, till it had under its dominion nearly all the trees of the Forest from the Hedge to the

Downs. Suddenly Tom's talk left the woods and went leaping up the young stream, over bubbling waterfalls, over pebbles and worn rocks, and among small flowers in close grass and wet crannies, wandering at last up on to the Downs. They heard of the Great Barrows, and the green mounds, and the stone-rings upon the hills and in the hollows among the hills. Sheep were bleating in flocks. Green walls and white walls rose. There were fortresses on the heights. Kings of little kingdoms fought together, and the young Sun shone like fire on the red metal of their new and greedy swords. There was victory and defeat; and towers fell, fortresses were burned, and flames went up into the sky. Gold was piled on the biers of dead kings and queens; and mounds covered them, and the stone doors were shut; and the grass grew over all. Sheep walked for a while biting the grass, but soon the hills were empty again. A shadow came out of dark places far away, and the bones were stirred in the mounds. Barrow-wights walked in the hollow places with a clink of rings on cold fingers, and gold chains in the wind. Stone rings grinned out of the ground like broken teeth in the moonlight. The hobbits shuddered. Even in the Shire the rumour of the Barrow-wights of the Barrow-downs beyond the Forest had been heard. But it was not a tale that any hobbit liked to listen to, even by a comfortable fireside far away. These four now suddenly remembered what the joy of this house had driven from their minds: the house of Tom Bombadil nestled under the very shoulder of those dreaded hills. They lost the thread of his tale and shifted uneasily, looking aside at one another. When they caught his words again they found that he had now wandered into strange regions beyond their memory and beyond their waking thought, into times when the world was wider, and the seas flowed straight to the western Shore; and still on and back Tom went singing out into ancient starlight, when only the Elf-sires were awake. Then suddenly he stopped, and they saw that he nodded as if he was falling asleep. The hobbits sat still before him, enchanted; and it seemed as if, under the spell of his words, the wind had gone, and the clouds had dried up, and the day had been withdrawn, and darkness had come from East and West, and all the sky was filled with the light of white stars. Whether the morning and evening of one day or of many days had passed Frodo could not tell. He did not feel either hungry or tired, only filled with wonder. The stars shone through the window and the silence of the heavens seemed to be round him. He spoke at last out of his wonder and a sudden fear of that silence: 'Who are you, Master?' he asked. 'Eh, what?' said Tom sitting up, and his eyes glinting in the gloom. 'Don't you know my name yet? That's the only answer. Tell me, who are you, alone, yourself and nameless? But you are young and I am old. Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside'. A shadow seemed to pass by the window, and the hobbits glanced hastily through the panes. When they turned again, Goldberry stood in the door behind, framed in light. She held a candle, shielding its flame from the draught with her hand; and the light flowed through it, like sunlight through a white shell. 'The rain has ended,' she said; 'and new waters are running downhill, under the stars. Let us now laugh and be glad!' 'And let us have food and drink!' cried Tom. 'Long tales are thirsty. And long listening's hungry work, morning, noon, and evening!' With that he jumped out of his chair, and with a bound took a candle from the chimney-shelf and lit it in the flame that Goldberry held; then he danced about the table. Suddenly he hopped through the door and disappeared. Quickly he returned, bearing a large and laden tray. Then Tom and Goldberry set the table; and the

hobbits sat half in wonder and half in laughter: so fair was the grace of Goldberry and so merry and odd the caperings of Tom. Yet in some fashion they seemed to weave a single dance, neither hindering the other, in and out of the room, and round about the table; and with great speed food and vessels and lights were set in order. The boards blazed with candles, white and yellow. Tom bowed to his guests. 'Supper is ready,' said Goldberry; and now the hobbits saw that she was clothed all in silver with a white girdle, and her shoes were like fishes' mail. But Tom was all in clean blue, blue as rain-washed forget-me-nots, and he had green stockings. It was a supper even better than before. The hobbits under the spell of Tom's words may have missed one meal or many, but when the food was before them it seemed at least a week since they had eaten. They did not sing or even speak much for a while, and paid close attention to business. But after a time their hearts and spirits rose high again, and their voices rang out in mirth and laughter. After they had eaten, Goldberry sang many songs for them, songs that began merrily in the hills and fell softly down into silence; and in the silences they saw in their minds pools and waters wider than any they had known, and looking into them they saw the sky below them and the stars like jewels in the depths. Then once more she wished them each good night and left them by the fireside. But Tom now seemed wide awake and plied them with questions. He appeared already to know much about them and all their families, and indeed to know much of all the history and doings of the Shire down from days hardly remembered among the hobbits themselves. It no longer surprised them; but he made no secret that he owed his recent knowledge largely to Farmer Maggot, whom he seemed to regard as a person of more importance than they had imagined. 'There's earth under his old feet, and clay on his fingers; wisdom in his bones, and both his eyes are open,' said Tom. It was also clear that Tom had dealings with the Elves, and it seemed that in some fashion, news had reached him from Gildor concerning the flight of Frodo. Indeed so much did Tom know, and so cunning was his questioning, that Frodo found himself telling him more about Bilbo and his own hopes and fears than he had told before even to Gandalf. Tom wagged his head up and down, and there was a glint in his eyes when he heard of the Riders. 'Show me the precious Ring!' he said suddenly in the midst of the story: and Frodo, to his own astonishment, drew out the chain from his pocket, and unfastening the Ring handed it at once to Tom. It seemed to grow larger as it lay for a moment on his big brown-skinned hand. Then suddenly he put it to his eye and laughed. For a second the hobbits had a vision, both comical and alarming, of his bright blue eye gleaming through a circle of gold. Then Tom put the Ring round the end of his little finger and held it up to the candlelight. For a moment the hobbits noticed nothing strange about this. Then they gasped. There was no sign of Tom disappearing! Tom laughed again, and then he spun the Ring in the air – and it vanished with a flash. Frodo gave a cry – and Tom leaned forward and handed it back to him with a smile. Frodo looked at it closely, and rather suspiciously (like one who has lent a trinket to a juggler). It was the same Ring, or looked the same and weighed the same: for that Ring had always seemed to Frodo to weigh strangely heavy in the hand. But something prompted him to make sure. He was perhaps a trifle annoyed with Tom for seeming to make so light of what even Gandalf thought so perilously important. He waited for an opportunity, when the talk was going again, and Tom was telling an absurd story about badgers and their queer ways – then he slipped the Ring on. Merry turned towards him to say something and gave a start, and checked an exclamation. Frodo was delighted (in a way): it was his own ring all right, for Merry was staring blankly at his chair, and obviously could not see him. He got up and crept quietly away from the fireside towards the outer door. 'Hey there!' cried Tom, glancing towards him with a most seeing look in his shining eyes. 'Hey! Come Frodo, there!

Where be you a-going? Old Tom Bombadil's not as blind as that yet. Take off your golden ring! Your hand's more fair without it. Come back! Leave your game and sit down beside me! We must talk a while more, and think about the morning. Tom must teach the right road, and keep your feet from wandering'. Frodo laughed (trying to feel pleased), and taking off the Ring he came and sat down again. Tom now told them that he reckoned the Sun would shine tomorrow, and it would be a glad morning, and setting out would be hopeful. But they would do well to start early; for weather in that country was a thing that even Tom could not be sure of for long, and it would change sometimes quicker than he could change his jacket. 'I am no weather-master,' said he; 'nor is aught that goes on two legs'. By his advice they decided to make nearly due North from his house, over the western and lower slopes of the Downs: they might hope in that way to strike the East Road in a day's journey, and avoid the Barrows. He told them not to be afraid – but to mind their own business. 'Keep to the green grass. Don't you go a-meddling with old stone or cold Wights or prying in their houses, unless you be strong folk with hearts that never falter!' He said this more than once; and he advised them to pass barrows by on the west-side, if they chanced to stray near one. Then he taught them a rhyme to sing, if they should by ill-luck fall into any danger or difficulty the next day. Ho! Tom Bombadil, Tom Bombadillo! By water, wood and hill, by the reed and willow, By fire, sun and moon, harken now and hear us! Come, Tom Bombadil, for our need is near us! When they had sung this altogether after him, he clapped them each on the shoulder with a laugh, and taking candles led them back to their bedroom. That night they heard no noises. But either in his dreams or out of them, he could not tell which, Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind: a song that seemed to come like a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain, and growing stronger to turn the veil all to glass and silver, until at last it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise. The vision melted into waking; and there was Tom whistling like a tree-full of birds; and the sun was already slanting down the hill and through the open window. Outside every-thing was green and pale gold. After breakfast, which they again ate alone, they made ready to say farewell, as nearly heavy of heart as was possible on such a morning: cool, bright, and clean under a washed autumn sky of thin blue. The air came fresh from the North-west. Their quiet ponies were almost frisky, sniffing and moving restlessly. Tom came out of the house and waved his hat and danced upon the doorstep, bidding the hobbits to get up and be off and go with good speed. They rode off along a path that wound away from behind the house, and went slanting up towards the north end of the hill-brow under which it sheltered. They had just dismounted to lead their ponies up the last steep slope, when suddenly Frodo stopped. 'Goldberry!' he cried. 'My fair lady, clad all in silver green! We have never said farewell to her, nor seen her since the evening!' He was so distressed that he turned back; but at that moment a clear call came rippling down. There on the hill-brow she stood beckoning to them: her hair was flying loose, and as it caught the sun it shone and shimmered. A light like the glint of water on dewy grass flashed from under her feet as she danced. They hastened up the last slope, and stood breathless beside her. They bowed, but with a wave of her arm she bade them look round; and they looked out from the hill-top over lands under the morning. It was now as clear and far-seen as it had been veiled and misty when they stood upon the knoll in the Forest, which could now be seen rising pale and green out of the dark trees in the West. In that direction the land rose in wooded ridges, green, yellow, russet under the sun, beyond which lay hidden the valley of the Brandywine. To the South, over the line of the Withywindle, there was a distant glint like pale glass where the Brandywine River made a great loop in the lowlands and flowed away out of the knowledge of the hobbits. Northward beyond the

dwindling downs the land ran away in flats and swellings of grey and green and pale earth-colours, until it faded into a featureless and shadowy distance. Eastward the Barrow-downs rose, ridge behind ridge into the morning, and vanished out of eyesight into a guess: it was no more than a guess of blue and a remote white glimmer blending with the hem of the sky, but it spoke to them, out of memory and old tales, of the high and distant mountains. They took a deep draught of the air, and felt that a skip and a few stout strides would bear them wherever they wished. It seemed fainthearted to go jogging aside over the crumpled skirts of the downs towards the Road, when they should be leaping, as lusty as Tom, over the stepping stones of the hills straight towards the Mountains. Goldberry spoke to them and recalled their eyes and thoughts. 'Speed now, fair guests!' she said. 'And hold to your purpose! North with the wind in the left eye and a blessing on your footsteps! Make haste while the Sun shines!' And to Frodo she said: 'Farewell, Elf-friend, it was a merry meeting!' But Frodo found no words to answer. He bowed low, and mounted his pony, and followed by his friends jogged slowly down the gentle slope behind the hill. Tom Bombadil's house and the valley, and the Forest were lost to view. The air grew warmer between the green walls of hillside and hillside, and the scent of turf rose strong and sweet as they breathed. Turning back, when they reached the bottom of the green hollow, they saw Goldberry, now small and slender like a sunlit flower against the sky: she was standing still watching them, and her hands were stretched out towards them. As they looked she gave a clear call, and lifting up her hand she turned and vanished behind the hill. Their way wound along the floor of the hollow, and round the green feet of a steep hill into another deeper and broader valley, and then over the shoulders of further hills, and down their long limbs, and up their smooth sides again, up on to new hill-tops and down into new valleys. There was no tree nor any visible water: it was a country of grass and short springy turf, silent except for the whisper of the air over the edges of the land, and high lonely cries of strange birds. As they journeyed the sun mounted, and grew hot. Each time they climbed a ridge the breeze seemed to have grown less. When they caught a glimpse of the country westward the distant Forest seemed to be smoking, as if the fallen rain was steaming up again from leaf and root and mould. A shadow now lay round the edge of sight, a dark haze above which the upper sky was like a blue cap, hot and heavy. About mid-day they came to a hill whose top was wide and flattened, like a shallow saucer with a green mounded rim. Inside there was no air stirring, and the sky seemed near their heads. They rode across and looked northwards. Then their hearts rose; for it seemed plain that they had come further already than they had expected. Certainly the distances had now all become hazy and deceptive, but there could be no doubt that the Downs were coming to an end. A long valley lay below them winding away northwards, until it came to an opening between two steep shoulders. Beyond, there seemed to be no more hills. Due north they faintly glimpsed a long dark line. 'That is a line of trees,' said Merry, 'and that must mark the Road. All along it for many leagues east of the Bridge there are trees growing. Some say they were planted in the old days'. 'Splendid!' said Frodo. 'If we make as good going this afternoon as we have done this morning, we shall have left the Downs before the Sun sets and be jogging on in search of a camping place'. But even as he spoke he turned his glance eastwards, and he saw that on that side the hills were higher and looked down upon them; and all those hills were crowned with green mounds, and on some were standing stones, pointing upwards like jagged teeth out of green gums. That view was somehow disquieting; so they turned from the sight and went down into the hollow circle. In the midst of it there stood a single stone, standing tall under the sun above, and at this hour casting no shadow. It was shapeless and yet significant: like a landmark, or a guarding finger, or more like a

warning. But they were now hungry, and the sun was still at the fearless noon; so they set their backs against the east side of the stone. It was cool, as if the sun had had no power to warm it; but at that time this seemed pleasant. There they took food and drink, and made as good a noon-meal under the open sky as anyone could wish; for the food came from 'down under Hill'. Tom had provided them with plenty for the comfort of the day. Their ponies unburdened strayed upon the grass. Riding over the hills, and eating their fill, the warm sun and the scent of turf, lying a little too long, stretching out their legs and looking at the sky above their noses: these things are, perhaps, enough to explain what happened. However that may be: they woke suddenly and uncomfortably from a sleep they had never meant to take. The standing stone was cold, and it cast a long pale shadow that stretched eastward over them. The sun, a pale and watery yellow, was gleaming through the mist just above the west wall of the hollow in which they lay; north, south, and east, beyond the wall the fog was thick, cold and white. The air was silent, heavy and chill. Their ponies were standing crowded together with their heads down. The hobbits sprang to their feet in alarm, and ran to the western rim. They found that they were upon an island in the fog. Even as they looked out in dismay towards the setting sun, it sank before their eyes into a white sea, and a cold grey shadow sprang up in the East behind. The fog rolled up to the walls and rose above them, and as it mounted it bent over their heads until it became a roof: they were shut in a hall of mist whose central pillar was the standing stone. They felt as if a trap was closing about them; but they did not quite lose heart. They still remembered the hopeful view they had had of the line of the Road ahead, and they still knew in which direction it lay. In any case, they now had so great a dislike for that hollow place about the stone that no thought of remaining there was in their minds. They packed up as quickly as their chilled fingers would work. Soon they were leading their ponies in single file over the rim and down the long northward slope of the hill, down into a foggy sea. As they went down the mist became colder and damper, and their hair hung lank and dripping on their foreheads. When they reached the bottom it was so chill that they halted and got out cloaks and hoods, which soon became bedewed with grey drops. Then, mounting their ponies, they went slowly on again, feeling their way by the rise and fall of the ground. They were steering, as well as they could guess, for the gate-like opening at the far northward end of the long valley which they had seen in the morning. Once they were through the gap, they had only to keep on in anything like a straight line and they were bound in the end to strike the Road. Their thoughts did not go beyond that, except for a vague hope that perhaps away beyond the Downs there might be no fog. Their going was very slow. To prevent their getting separated and wandering in different directions they went in file, with Frodo leading. Sam was behind him, and after him came Pippin, and then Merry. The valley seemed to stretch on endlessly. Suddenly Frodo saw a hopeful sign. On either side ahead a darkness began to loom through the mist; and he guessed that they were at last approaching the gap in the hills, the north-gate of the Barrow-downs. If they could pass that, they would be free. 'Come on! Follow me!' he called back over his shoulder, and he hurried forward. But his hope soon changed to bewilderment and alarm. The dark patches grew darker, but they shrank; and suddenly he saw, towering ominous before him and leaning slightly towards one another like the pillars of a headless door, two huge standing stones. He could not remember having seen any sign of these in the valley, when he looked out from the hill in the morning. He had passed between them almost before he was aware: and even as he did so darkness seemed to fall round him. His pony reared and snorted, and he fell off. When he looked back he found that he was alone: the others had not followed him. 'Sam!' he called. 'Pippin! Merry! Come along! Why don't you keep up?' There was no answer. Fear took

him, and he ran back past the stones shouting wildly: 'Sam! Sam! Merry! Pippin!' The pony bolted into the mist and vanished. From some way off, or so it seemed, he thought he heard a cry: 'Hoy! Frodo! Hoy!' It was away eastward, on his left as he stood under the great stones, staring and straining into the gloom. He plunged off in the direction of the call, and found himself going steeply uphill. As he struggled on he called again, and kept on calling more and more frantically; but he heard no answer for some time, and then it seemed faint and far ahead and high above him. 'Frodo! Hoy!' came the thin voices out of the mist: and then a cry that sounded like help, help! often repeated, ending with a last help! that trailed off into a long wail suddenly cut short. He stumbled forward with all the speed he could towards the cries; but the light was now gone, and clinging night had closed about him, so that it was impossible to be sure of any direction. He seemed all the time to be climbing up and up. Only the change in the level of the ground at his feet told him when he at last came to the top of a ridge or hill. He was weary, sweating and yet chilled. It was wholly dark. 'Where are you?' he cried out miserably. There was no reply. He stood listening. He was suddenly aware that it was getting very cold, and that up here a wind was beginning to blow, an icy wind. A change was coming in the weather. The mist was flowing past him now in shreds and tatters. His breath was smoking, and the darkness was less near and thick. He looked up and saw with surprise that faint stars were appearing overhead amid the strands of hurrying cloud and fog. The wind began to hiss over the grass. He imagined suddenly that he caught a muffled cry, and he made towards it; and even as he went forward the mist was rolled up and thrust aside, and the starry sky was unveiled. A glance showed him that he was now facing southwards and was on a round hill-top, which he must have climbed from the north. Out of the east the biting wind was blowing. To his right there loomed against the westward stars a dark black shape. A great barrow stood there. 'Where are you?' he cried again, both angry and afraid. 'Here!' said a voice, deep and cold, that seemed to come out of the ground. 'I am waiting for you!' 'No!' said Frodo; but he did not run away. His knees gave, and he fell on the ground. Nothing happened, and there was no sound. Trembling he looked up, in time to see a tall dark figure like a shadow against the stars. It leaned over him. He thought there were two eyes, very cold though lit with a pale light that seemed to come from some remote distance. Then a grip stronger and colder than iron seized him. The icy touch froze his bones, and he remembered no more. When he came to himself again, for a moment he could recall nothing except a sense of dread. Then suddenly he knew that he was imprisoned, caught hopelessly; he was in a barrow. A Barrow-wight had taken him, and he was probably already under the dreadful spells of the Barrow-wights about which whispered tales spoke. He dared not move, but lay as he found himself: flat on his back upon a cold stone with his hands on his breast. But though his fear was so great that it seemed to be part of the very darkness that was round him, he found himself as he lay thinking about Bilbo Baggins and his stories, of their jogging along together in the lanes of the Shire and talking about roads and adventures. There is a seed of courage hidden (often deeply, it is true) in the heart of the fattest and most timid hobbit, waiting for some final and desperate danger to make it grow. Frodo was neither very fat nor very timid; indeed, though he did not know it, Bilbo (and Gandalf) had thought him the best hobbit in the Shire. He thought he had come to the end of his adventure, and a terrible end, but the thought hardened him. He found himself stiffening, as if for a final spring; he no longer felt limp like a helpless prey. As he lay there, thinking and getting a hold of himself, he noticed all at once that the darkness was slowly giving way: a pale greenish light was growing round him. It did not at first show him what kind of a place he was in, for the light seemed to be coming out of himself, and from the floor beside him, and had not yet

reached the roof or wall. He turned, and there in the cold glow he saw lying beside him Sam, Pippin, and Merry. They were on their backs, and their faces looked deathly pale; and they were clad in white. About them lay many treasures, of gold maybe, though in that light they looked cold and unlovely. On their heads were circlets, gold chains were about their waists, and on their fingers were many rings. Swords lay by their sides, and shields were at their feet. But across their three necks lay one long naked sword. Suddenly a song began: a cold murmur, rising and falling. The voice seemed far away and immeasurably dreary, sometimes high in the air and thin, sometimes like a low moan from the ground. Out of the formless stream of sad but horrible sounds, strings of words would now and again shape themselves: grim, hard, cold words, heartless and miserable. The night was railing against the morning of which it was bereaved, and the cold was cursing the warmth for which it hungered. Frodo was chilled to the marrow. After a while the song became clearer, and with dread in his heart he perceived that it had changed into an incantation: Cold be hand and heart and bone, and cold be sleep under stone: never more to wake on stony bed, never, till the Sun fails and the Moon is dead. In the black wind the stars shall die, and still on gold here let them lie, till the dark lord lifts his hand over dead sea and withered land. He heard behind his head a creaking and scraping sound. Raising himself on one arm he looked, and saw now in the pale light that they were in a kind of passage which behind them turned a corner. Round the corner a long arm was groping, walking on its fingers towards Sam, who was lying nearest, and towards the hilt of the sword that lay upon him. At first Frodo felt as if he had indeed been turned into stone by the incantation. Then a wild thought of escape came to him. He wondered if he put on the Ring, whether the Barrow-wight would miss him, and he might find some way out. He thought of himself running free over the grass, grieving for Merry, and Sam, and Pippin, but free and alive himself. Gandalf would admit that there had been nothing else he could do. But the courage that had been awakened in him was now too strong: he could not leave his friends so easily. He wavered, groping in his pocket, and then fought with himself again; and as he did so the arm crept nearer. Suddenly resolve hardened in him, and he seized a short sword that lay beside him, and kneeling he stooped low over the bodies of his companions. With what strength he had he hewed at the crawling arm near the wrist, and the hand broke off; but at the same moment the sword splintered up to the hilt. There was a shriek and the light vanished. In the dark there was a snarling noise. Frodo fell forward over Merry, and Merry's face felt cold. All at once back into his mind, from which it had disappeared with the first coming of the fog, came the memory of the house down under the Hill, and of Tom singing. He remembered the rhyme that Tom had taught them. In a small desperate voice he began: Ho! Tom Bombadil! and with that name his voice seemed to grow strong: it had a full and lively sound, and the dark chamber echoed as if to drum and trumpet. Ho! Tom Bombadil, Tom Bombadillo! By water, wood and hill, by the reed and willow, By fire, sun and moon, harken now and hear us! Come, Tom Bombadil, for our need is near us! There was a sudden deep silence, in which Frodo could hear his heart beating. After a long slow moment he heard plain, but far away, as if it was coming down through the ground or through thick walls, an answering voice singing: Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow, Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow. None has ever caught him yet, for Tom, he is the master: His songs are stronger songs, and his feet are faster. There was a loud rumbling sound, as of stones rolling and falling, and suddenly light streamed in, real light, the plain light of day. A low door-like opening appeared at the end of the chamber beyond Frodo's feet; and there was Tom's head (hat, feather, and all) framed against the light of the sun rising red behind him. The light fell upon the floor, and upon the faces of the three hobbits lying

beside Frodo. They did not stir, but the sickly hue had left them. They looked now as if they were only very deeply asleep. Tom stooped, removed his hat, and came into the dark chamber, singing: Get out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight! Shivel like the cold mist, like the winds go wailing, Out into the barren lands far beyond the mountains! Come never here again! Leave your barrow empty! Lost and forgotten be, darker than the darkness, Where gates stand for ever shut, till the world is mended. At these words there was a cry and part of the inner end of the chamber fell in with a crash. Then there was a long trailing shriek, fading away into an unguessable distance; and after that silence. 'Come, friend Frodo!' said Tom. 'Let us get out on to clean grass! You must help me bear them'. Together they carried out Merry, Pippin, and Sam. As Frodo left the barrow for the last time he thought he saw a severed hand wriggling still, like a wounded spider, in a heap of fallen earth. Tom went back in again, and there was a sound of much thumping and stamping. When he came out he was bearing in his arms a great load of treasure: things of gold, silver, copper, and bronze; many beads and chains and jewelled ornaments. He climbed the green barrow and laid them all on top in the sunshine. There he stood, with his hat in his hand and the wind in his hair, and looked down upon the three hobbits, that had been laid on their backs upon the grass at the west side of the mound. Raising his right hand he said in a clear and commanding voice: Wake now my merry lads! Wake and hear me calling! Warm now be heart and limb! The cold stone is fallen; Dark door is standing wide; dead hand is broken. Night under Night is flown, and the Gate is open! To Frodo's great joy the hobbits stirred, stretched their arms, rubbed their eyes, and then suddenly sprang up. They looked about in amazement, first at Frodo, and then at Tom standing large as life on the barrow-top above them; and then at themselves in their thin white rags, crowned and belted with pale gold, and jingling with trinkets. 'What in the name of wonder?' began Merry, feeling the golden circlet that had slipped over one eye. Then he stopped, and a shadow came over his face, and he closed his eyes. 'Of course, I remember!' he said. 'The men of Carn Du'm came on us at night, and we were worsted. Ah! the spear in my heart!' He clutched at his breast. 'No! No!' he said, opening his eyes. 'What am I saying? I have been dream- ing. Where did you get to, Frodo?' 'I thought that I was lost,' said Frodo; 'but I don't want to speak of it. Let us think of what we are to do now! Let us go on!' 'Dressed up like this, sir?' said Sam. 'Where are my clothes?' He flung his circlet, belt, and rings on the grass, and looked round helplessly, as if he expected to find his cloak, jacket, and breeches, and other hobbit-garments lying some- where to hand. 'You won't find your clothes again,' said Tom, bounding down from the mound, and laughing as he danced round them in the sunlight. One would have thought that nothing dangerous or dreadful had happened; and indeed the horror faded out of their hearts as they looked at him, and saw the merry glint in his eyes. 'What do you mean?' asked Pippin, looking at him, half puzzled and half amused. 'Why not?' But Tom shook his head, saying: 'You've found your- selves again, out of the deep water. Clothes are but little loss, if you escape from drowning. Be glad, my merry friends, and let the warm sunlight heat now heart and limb! Cast off these cold rags! Run naked on the grass, while Tom goes a-hunting!' He sprang away down hill, whistling and calling. Looking down after him Frodo saw him running away southwards along the green hollow between their hill and the next, still whistling and crying: Hey! now! Come hoy now! Whither do you wander? Up, down, near or far, here, there or yonder? Sharp-ears, Wise-nose, Swish-tail and Bumpkin, White-socks my little lad, and old Fatty Lumpkin! So he sang, running fast, tossing up his hat and catching it, until he was hidden by a fold of the ground: but for some time his hey now! hoy now! came floating back down the wind, which had shifted round towards the south. The air was growing very warm again. The hobbits ran about

for a while on the grass, as he told them. Then they lay basking in the sun with the delight of those that have been wafted suddenly from bitter winter to a friendly clime, or of people that, after being long ill and bedridden, wake one day to find that they are unexpectedly well and the day is again full of promise. By the time that Tom returned they were feeling strong (and hungry). He reappeared, hat first, over the brow of the hill, and behind him came in an obedient line six ponies: their own five and one more. The last was plainly old Fatty Lumpkin: he was larger, stronger, fatter (and older) than their own ponies. Merry, to whom the others belonged, had not, in fact, given them any such names, but they answered to the new names that Tom had given them for the rest of their lives. Tom called them one by one and they climbed over the brow and stood in a line. Then Tom bowed to the hobbits. 'Here are your ponies, now!' he said. 'They've more sense (in some ways) than you wandering hobbits have – more sense in their noses. For they sniff danger ahead which you walk right into; and if they run to save themselves, then they run the right way. You must forgive them all; for though their hearts are faithful, to face fear of Barrow-wights is not what they were made for. See, here they come again, bringing all their burdens!' Merry, Sam, and Pippin now clothed themselves in spare garments from their packs; and they soon felt too hot, for they were obliged to put on some of the thicker and warmer things that they had brought against the oncoming of winter. 'Where does that other old animal, that Fatty Lumpkin, come from?' asked Frodo. 'He's mine,' said Tom. 'My four-legged friend; though I seldom ride him, and he wanders often far, free upon the hillsides. When your ponies stayed with me, they got to know my Lumpkin; and they smelt him in the night, and quickly ran to meet him. I thought he'd look for them and with his words of wisdom take all their fear away. But now, my jolly Lumpkin, old Tom's going to ride. Hey! he's coming with you, just to set you on the road; so he needs a pony. For you cannot easily talk to hobbits that are riding, when you're on your own legs trying to trot beside them'. The hobbits were delighted to hear this, and thanked Tom many times; but he laughed, and said that they were so good at losing themselves that he would not feel happy till he had seen them safe over the borders of his land. 'I've got things to do,' he said: 'my making and my singing, my talking and my walking, and my watching of the country. Tom can't be always near to open doors and willow-cracks. Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting'. It was still fairly early by the sun, something between nine and ten, and the hobbits turned their minds to food. Their last meal had been lunch beside the standing stone the day before. They breakfasted now off the remainder of Tom's provisions, meant for their supper, with additions that Tom had brought with him. It was not a large meal (considering hobbits and the circumstances), but they felt much better for it. While they were eating Tom went up to the mound, and looked through the treasures. Most of these he made into a pile that glistened and sparkled on the grass. He bade them lie there 'free to all finders, birds, beasts, Elves or Men, and all kindly creatures'; for so the spell of the mound should be broken and scattered and no Wight ever come back to it. He chose for himself from the pile a brooch set with blue stones, many-shaded like flax-flowers or the wings of blue butterflies. He looked long at it, as if stirred by some memory, shaking his head, and saying at last: 'Here is a pretty toy for Tom and for his lady! Fair was she who long ago wore this on her shoulder. Goldberry shall wear it now, and we will not forget her!' For each of the hobbits he chose a dagger, long, leaf-shaped, and keen, of marvellous workmanship, damasked with serpent-forms in red and gold. They gleamed as he drew them from their black sheaths, wrought of some strange metal, light and strong, and set with many fiery stones. Whether by some virtue in these sheaths or because of the spell that lay on the mound, the blades seemed untouched by time, unruined, sharp, glittering in the sun. 'Old knives

are long enough as swords for hobbit-people,' he said. 'Sharp blades are good to have, if Shire-folk go walking, east, south, or far away into dark and danger'. Then he told them that these blades were forged many long years ago by Men of Westernesse: they were foes of the Dark Lord, but they were overcome by the evil king of Carn Du'm in the Land of Angmar. 'Few now remember them,' Tom murmured, 'yet still some go wandering, sons of forgotten kings walking in loneliness, guarding from evil things folk that are heedless'. The hobbits did not understand his words, but as he spoke they had a vision as it were of a great expanse of years behind them, like a vast shadowy plain over which there strode shapes of Men, tall and grim with bright swords, and last came one with a star on his brow. Then the vision faded, and they were back in the sunlit world. It was time to start again. They made ready, packing their bags and lading their ponies. Their new weapons they hung on their leather belts under their jackets, feeling them very awkward, and wondering if they would be of any use. Fighting had not before occurred to any of them as one of the adventures in which their flight would land them. At last they set off. They led their ponies down the hill; and then mounting they trotted quickly along the valley. They looked back and saw the top of the old mound on the hill, and from it the sunlight on the gold went up like a yellow flame. Then they turned a shoulder of the Downs and it was hidden from view. Though Frodo looked about him on every side he saw no sign of the great stones standing like a gate, and before long they came to the northern gap and rode swiftly through, and the land fell away before them. It was a merry journey with Tom Bombadil trotting gaily beside them, or before them, on Fatty Lumpkin, who could move much faster than his girth promised. Tom sang most of the time, but it was chiefly nonsense, or else perhaps a strange language unknown to the hobbits, an ancient language whose words were mainly those of wonder and delight. They went forward steadily, but they soon saw that the Road was further away than they had imagined. Even without a fog, their sleep at mid-day would have prevented them from reaching it until after nightfall on the day before. The dark line they had seen was not a line of trees but a line of bushes growing on the edge of a deep dike with a steep wall on the further side. Tom said that it had once been the boundary of a kingdom, but a very long time ago. He seemed to remember something sad about it, and would not say much. They climbed down and out of the dike and through a gap in the wall, and then Tom turned due north, for they had been bearing somewhat to the west. The land was now open and fairly level, and they quickened their pace, but the sun was already sinking low when at last they saw a line of tall trees ahead, and they knew that they had come back to the Road after many unexpected adventures. They galloped their ponies over the last furlongs, and halted under the long shadows of the trees. They were on the top of a sloping bank, and the Road, now dim as evening drew on, wound away below them. At this point it ran nearly from South-west to North-east, and on their right it fell quickly down into a wide hollow. It was rutted and bore many signs of the recent heavy rain; there were pools and pot-holes full of water. They rode down the bank and looked up and down. There was nothing to be seen. 'Well, here we are again at last!' said Frodo. 'I suppose we haven't lost more than two days by my short cut through the Forest! But perhaps the delay will prove useful – it may have put them off our trail'. The others looked at him. The shadow of the fear of the Black Riders came suddenly over them again. Ever since they had entered the Forest they had thought chiefly of getting back to the Road; only now when it lay beneath their feet did they remember the danger which pursued them, and was more than likely to be lying in wait for them upon the Road itself. They looked anxiously back towards the setting sun, but the Road was brown and empty. 'Do you think,' asked Pippin hesitatingly, 'do you think we may be pursued, tonight?' 'No, I

hope not tonight,' answered Tom Bombadil; 'nor perhaps the next day. But do not trust my guess; for I cannot tell for certain. Out east my knowledge fails. Tom is not master of Riders from the Black Land far beyond his country'. All the same the hobbits wished he was coming with them. They felt that he would know how to deal with Black Riders, if anyone did. They would soon now be going forward into lands wholly strange to them, and beyond all but the most vague and distant legends of the Shire, and in the gathering twilight they longed for home. A deep loneliness and sense of loss was on them. They stood silent, reluctant to make the final parting, and only slowly became aware that Tom was wishing them farewell, and telling them to have good heart and to ride on till dark without halting. 'Tom will give you good advice, till this day is over (after that your own luck must go with you and guide you): four miles along the Road you'll come upon a village, Bree under Bree-hill, with doors looking westward. There you'll find an old inn that is called The Prancing Pony. Barliman Butterbur is the worthy keeper. There you can stay the night, and afterwards the morning will speed you upon your way. Be bold, but wary! Keep up your merry hearts, and ride to meet your fortune!' They begged him to come at least as far as the inn and drink once more with them; but he laughed and refused, saying: Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders. Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting! Then he turned, tossed up his hat, leaped on Lumpkin's back, and rode up over the bank and away singing into the dusk. The hobbits climbed up and watched him until he was out of sight. 'I am sorry to take leave of Master Bombadil,' said Sam. 'He's a caution and no mistake. I reckon we may go a good deal further and see naught better, nor queerer. But I won't deny I'll be glad to see this Prancing Pony he spoke of. I hope it'll be like The Green Dragon away back home! What sort of folk are they in Bree?' 'There are hobbits in Bree,' said Merry, 'as well as Big Folk. I daresay it will be homelike enough. The Pony is a good inn by all accounts. My people ride out there now and again'. 'It may be all we could wish,' said Frodo; 'but it is outside the Shire all the same. Don't make yourselves too much at home! Please remember – all of you – that the name of Baggins must not be mentioned. I am Mr Underhill, if any name must be given'. They now mounted their ponies and rode off silently into the evening. Darkness came down quickly, as they plodded slowly downhill and up again, until at last they saw lights twinkling some distance ahead. Before them rose Bree-hill barring the way, a dark mass against misty stars; and under its western flank nestled a large village. Towards it they now hurried desiring only to find a fire, and a door between them and the night. Bree was the chief village of the Bree-land, a small inhabited region, like an island in the empty lands round about. Besides Bree itself, there was Staddle on the other side of the hill, Combe in a deep valley a little further eastward, and Archet on the edge of the Chetwood. Lying round Bree-hill and the villages was a small country of fields and tamed woodland only a few miles broad. The Men of Bree were brown-haired, broad, and rather short, cheerful and independent: they belonged to nobody but themselves; but they were more friendly and familiar with Hobbits, Dwarves, Elves, and other inhabitants of the world about them than was (or is) usual with Big People. According to their own tales they were the original inhabitants and were the descendants of the first Men that ever wandered into the West of the middle-world. Few had survived the turmoils of the Elder Days; but when the Kings returned again over the Great Sea they had found the Bree-men still there, and they were still there now, when the memory of the old Kings had faded into the grass. In those days no other Men had settled dwellings so far west, or within a hundred leagues of the Shire. But in the wild lands beyond Bree there were mysterious wanderers. The Bree-folk called them Rangers, and knew nothing of their origin. They were taller and darker than the Men of Bree and were believed to have

strange powers of sight and hearing, and to understand the languages of beasts and birds. They roamed at will southwards, and eastwards even as far as the Misty Mountains; but they were now few and rarely seen. When they appeared they brought news from afar, and told strange forgotten tales which were eagerly listened to; but the Bree-folk did not make friends of them. There were also many families of hobbits in the Bree-land; and they claimed to be the oldest settlement of Hobbits in the world, one that was founded long before even the Brandywine was crossed and the Shire colonized. They lived mostly in Staddle though there were some in Bree itself, especially on the higher slopes of the hill, above the houses of the Men. The Big Folk and the Little Folk (as they called one another) were on friendly terms, minding their own affairs in their own ways, but both rightly regarding themselves as necessary parts of the Bree-folk. Nowhere else in the world was this peculiar (but excellent) arrangement to be found. The Bree-folk, Big and Little, did not themselves travel much; and the affairs of the four villages were their chief concern. Occasionally the Hobbits of Bree went as far as Buckland, or the Eastfarthing; but though their little land was not much further than a day's riding east of the Brandywine Bridge, the Hobbits of the Shire now seldom visited it. An occasional Bucklander or adventurous Took would come out to the Inn for a night or two, but even that was becoming less and less usual. The Shire-hobbits referred to those of Bree, and to any others that lived beyond the borders, as Outsiders, and took very little interest in them, considering them dull and uncouth. There were probably many more Outsiders scattered about in the West of the World in those days than the people of the Shire imagined. Some, doubtless, were no better than tramps, ready to dig a hole in any bank and stay only as long as it suited them. But in the Bree-land, at any rate, the hobbits were decent and prosperous, and no more rustic than most of their distant relatives Inside. It was not yet forgotten that there had been a time when there was much coming and going between the Shire and Bree. There was Bree-blood in the Brandybucks by all accounts. The village of Bree had some hundred stone houses of the Big Folk, mostly above the Road, nestling on the hillside with windows looking west. On that side, running in more than half a circle from the hill and back to it, there was a deep dike with a thick hedge on the inner side. Over this the Road crossed by a causeway; but where it pierced the hedge it was barred by a great gate. There was another gate in the southern corner where the Road ran out of the village. The gates were closed at nightfall; but just inside them were small lodges for the gatekeepers. Down on the Road, where it swept to the right to go round the foot of the hill, there was a large inn. It had been built long ago when the traffic on the roads had been far greater. For Bree stood at an old meeting of ways; another ancient road crossed the East Road just outside the dike at the western end of the village, and in former days Men and other folk of various sorts had travelled much on it. Strange as News from Bree was still a saying in the Eastfarthing, descending from those days, when news from North, South, and East could be heard in the inn, and when the Shire-hobbits used to go more often to hear it. But the Northern Lands had long been desolate, and the North Road was now seldom used: it was grass-grown, and the Bree-folk called it the Greenway. The Inn of Bree was still there, however, and the innkeeper was an important person. His house was a meeting place for the idle, talkative, and inquisitive among the inhabitants, large and small, of the four villages; and a resort of Rangers and other wanderers, and for such travellers (mostly dwarves) as still journeyed on the East Road, to and from the Mountains. It was dark, and white stars were shining, when Frodo and his companions came at last to the Greenway-crossing and drew near the village. They came to the West-gate and found it shut; but at the door of the lodge beyond it, there was a man sitting. He jumped up and fetched a lantern and looked over the gate at them in surprise.

‘What do you want, and where do you come from?’ he asked gruffly. ‘We are making for the inn here,’ answered Frodo. ‘We are journeying east and cannot go further tonight’. ‘Hobbits! Four hobbits! And what’s more, out of the Shire by their talk,’ said the gatekeeper, softly as if speaking to himself. He stared at them darkly for a moment, and then slowly opened the gate and let them ride through. ‘We don’t often see Shire-folk riding on the Road at night,’ he went on, as they halted a moment by his door. ‘You’ll pardon my wondering what business takes you away east of Bree! What may your names be, might I ask?’ ‘Our names and our business are our own, and this does not seem a good place to discuss them,’ said Frodo, not liking the look of the man or the tone of his voice. ‘Your business is your own, no doubt,’ said the man; ‘but it’s my business to ask questions after nightfall’. ‘We are hobbits from Buckland, and we have a fancy to travel and to stay at the inn here,’ put in Merry. ‘I am Mr Brandybuck. Is that enough for you? The Bree-folk used to be fair-spoken to travellers, or so I had heard’. ‘All right, all right!’ said the man. ‘I meant no offence. But you’ll find maybe that more folk than old Harry at the gate will be asking you questions. There’s queer folk about. If you go on to The Pony, you’ll find you’re not the only guests’. He wished them good night, and they said no more; but Frodo could see in the lantern-light that the man was still eyeing them curiously. He was glad to hear the gate clang to behind them, as they rode forward. He wondered why the man was so suspicious, and whether anyone had been asking for news of a party of hobbits. Could it have been Gandalf? He might have arrived, while they were delayed in the Forest and the Downs. But there was something in the look and the voice of the gatekeeper that made him uneasy. The man stared after the hobbits for a moment, and then he went back to his house. As soon as his back was turned, a dark figure climbed quickly in over the gate and melted into the shadows of the village street. The hobbits rode on up a gentle slope, passing a few detached houses, and drew up outside the inn. The houses looked large and strange to them. Sam stared up at the inn with its three storeys and many windows, and felt his heart sink. He had imagined himself meeting giants taller than trees, and other creatures even more terrifying, some time or other in the course of his journey; but at the moment he was finding his first sight of Men and their tall houses quite enough, indeed too much for the dark end of a tiring day. He pictured black horses standing all saddled in the shadows of the inn-yard, and Black Riders peering out of dark upper windows. ‘We surely aren’t going to stay here for the night, are we, sir?’ he exclaimed. ‘If there are hobbit-folk in these parts, why don’t we look for some that would be willing to take us in? It would be more homelike’. ‘What’s wrong with the inn?’ said Frodo. ‘Tom Bombadil recommended it. I expect it’s homelike enough inside’. Even from the outside the inn looked a pleasant house to familiar eyes. It had a front on the Road, and two wings running back on land partly cut out of the lower slopes of the hill, so that at the rear the second-floor windows were level with the ground. There was a wide arch leading to a courtyard between the two wings, and on the left under the arch there was a large doorway reached by a few broad steps. The door was open and light streamed out of it. Above the arch there was a lamp, and beneath it swung a large sign-board: a fat white pony reared up on its hind legs. Over the door was painted in white letters: the prancing pony by barliman butterbur. Many of the lower windows showed lights behind thick curtains. As they hesitated outside in the gloom, someone began singing a merry song inside, and many cheerful voices joined loudly in the chorus. They listened to this encouraging sound for a moment and then got off their ponies. The song ended and there was a burst of laughter and clapping. They led their ponies under the arch, and leaving them standing in the yard they climbed up the steps. Frodo went forward and nearly bumped into a short fat man with a bald head and a red face. He had a white

apron on, and was bustling out of one door and in through another, carrying a tray laden with full mugs. 'Can we——' began Frodo. 'Half a minute, if you please!' shouted the man over his shoulder, and vanished into a babel of voices and a cloud of smoke. In a moment he was out again, wiping his hands on his apron. 'Good evening, little master!' he said, bending down. 'What may you be wanting?' 'Beds for four, and stabling for five ponies, if that can be managed. Are you Mr Butterbur?' 'That's right! Barliman is my name. Barliman Butterbur at your service! You're from the Shire, eh?' he said, and then suddenly he clapped his hand to his forehead, as if trying to remember something. 'Hobbits!' he cried. 'Now what does that remind me of? Might I ask your names, sirs?' 'Mr Took and Mr Brandybuck,' said Frodo; 'and this is Sam Gamgee. My name is Underhill'. 'There now!' said Mr Butterbur, snapping his fingers. 'It's gone again! But it'll come back, when I have time to think. I'm run off my feet; but I'll see what I can do for you. We don't often get a party out of the Shire nowadays, and I should be sorry not to make you welcome. But there is such a crowd already in the house tonight as there hasn't been for long enough. It never rains but it pours, we say in Bree'. 'Hi! Nob!' he shouted. 'Where are you, you woolly-footed slowcoach? Nob!' 'Coming, sir! Coming!' A cheery-looking hobbit bobbed out of a door, and seeing the travellers, stopped short and stared at them with great interest. 'Where's Bob?' asked the landlord. 'You don't know? Well, find him! Double sharp! I haven't got six legs, nor six eyes neither! Tell Bob there's five ponies that have to be stabled. He must find room somehow'. Nob trotted off with a grin and a wink. 'Well now, what was I going to say?' said Mr Butterbur, tapping his forehead. 'One thing drives out another, so to speak. I'm that busy tonight, my head is going round. There's a party that came up the Greenway from down South last night – and that was strange enough to begin with. Then there's a travelling company of dwarves going West come in this evening. And now there's you. If you weren't hobbits, I doubt if we could house you. But we've got a room or two in the north wing that were made special for hobbits, when this place was built. On the ground floor as they usually prefer; round windows and all as they like it. I hope you'll be comfortable. You'll be wanting supper, I don't doubt. As soon as may be. This way now!' He led them a short way down a passage, and opened a door. 'Here is a nice little parlour!' he said. 'I hope it will suit. Excuse me now. I'm that busy. No time for talking. I must be trotting. It's hard work for two legs, but I don't get thinner. I'll look in again later. If you want anything, ring the hand-bell, and Nob will come. If he don't come, ring and shout!' Off he went at last, and left them feeling rather breathless. He seemed capable of an endless stream of talk, however busy he might be. They found themselves in a small and cosy room. There was a bit of bright fire burning on the hearth, and in front of it were some low and comfortable chairs. There was a round table, already spread with a white cloth, and on it was a large hand-bell. But Nob, the hobbit servant, came bustling in long before they thought of ringing. He brought candles and a tray full of plates. 'Will you be wanting anything to drink, masters?' he asked. 'And shall I show you the bedrooms, while your supper is got ready?' They were washed and in the middle of good deep mugs of beer when Mr Butterbur and Nob came in again. In a twinkling the table was laid. There was hot soup, cold meats, a blackberry tart, new loaves, slabs of butter, and half a ripe cheese: good plain food, as good as the Shire could show, and homelike enough to dispel the last of Sam's misgivings (already much relieved by the excellence of the beer). The landlord hovered round for a little, and then prepared to leave them. 'I don't know whether you would care to join the company, when you have supped,' he said, standing at the door. 'Perhaps you would rather go to your beds. Still the company would be very pleased to welcome you, if you had a mind. We don't get Outsiders – travellers from the Shire, I should say, begging your pardon –

often; and we like to hear a bit of news, or any story or song you may have in mind. But as you please! Ring the bell, if you lack anything!’ So refreshed and encouraged did they feel at the end of their supper (about three quarters of an hour’s steady going, not hindered by unnecessary talk) that Frodo, Pippin, and Sam decided to join the company. Merry said it would be too stuffy. ‘I shall sit here quietly by the fire for a bit, and perhaps go out later for a sniff of the air. Mind your Ps and Qs, and don’t forget that you are supposed to be escaping in secret, and are still on the high-road and not very far from the Shire!’ ‘All right!’ said Pippin. ‘Mind yourself! Don’t get lost, and don’t forget that it is safer indoors!’ The company was in the big common-room of the inn. The gathering was large and mixed, as Frodo discovered, when his eyes got used to the light. This came chiefly from a blazing log-fire, for the three lamps hanging from the beams were dim, and half veiled in smoke. Barliman Butterbur was standing near the fire, talking to a couple of dwarves and one or two strange-looking men. On the benches were various folk: men of Bree, a collection of local hobbits (sitting chattering together), a few more dwarves, and other vague figures difficult to make out away in the shadows and corners. As soon as the Shire-hobbits entered, there was a chorus of welcome from the Bree-landers. The strangers, especially those that had come up the Greenway, stared at them curiously. The landlord introduced the newcomers to the Bree-folk, so quickly that, though they caught many names, they were seldom sure who the names belonged to. The Men of Bree seemed all to have rather botanical (and to the Shire-folk rather odd) names, like Rushlight, Goatleaf, Heather-toes, Appledore, Thistlewool and Ferny (not to mention Butterbur). Some of the hobbits had similar names. The Mugworts, for instance, seemed numerous. But most of them had natural names, such as Banks, Brockhouse, Longholes, Sandheaver, and Tunnelly, many of which were used in the Shire. There were several Underhills from Staddle, and as they could not imagine sharing a name without being related, they took Frodo to their hearts as a long-lost cousin. The Bree-hobbits were, in fact, friendly and inquisitive, and Frodo soon found that some explanation of what he was doing would have to be given. He gave out that he was interested in history and geography (at which there was much wagging of heads, although neither of these words were much used in the Bree-dialect). He said he was thinking of writing a book (at which there was silent astonishment), and that he and his friends wanted to collect information about hobbits living outside the Shire, especially in the eastern lands. At this a chorus of voices broke out. If Frodo had really wanted to write a book, and had had many ears, he would have learned enough for several. And if that was not enough, he was given a whole list of names, beginning with ‘Old Barliman here’, to whom he could go for further information. But after a time, as Frodo did not show any sign of writing a book on the spot, the hobbits returned to their questions about doings in the Shire. Frodo did not prove very communicative, and he soon found himself sitting alone in a corner, listening and looking around. The Men and Dwarves were mostly talking of distant events and telling news of a kind that was becoming only too familiar. There was trouble away in the South, and it seemed that the Men who had come up the Greenway were on the move, looking for lands where they could find some peace. The Bree-folk were sympathetic, but plainly not very ready to take a large number of strangers into their little land. One of the travellers, a squint-eyed ill-favoured fellow, was fore-telling that more and more people would be coming north in the near future. ‘If room isn’t found for them, they’ll find it for themselves. They’ve a right to live, same as other folk,’ he said loudly. The local inhabitants did not look pleased at the prospect. The hobbits did not pay much attention to all this, as it did not at the moment seem to concern hobbits. Big Folk could hardly beg for lodgings in hobbit-holes. They were more interested in Sam and Pippin, who

were now feeling quite at home, and were chatting gaily about events in the Shire. Pippin roused a good deal of laughter with an account of the collapse of the roof of the Town Hole in Michel Delving: Will Whitfoot, the Mayor, and the fattest hobbit in the Westfarthing, had been buried in chalk, and came out like a floured dumpling. But there were several questions asked that made Frodo a little uneasy. One of the Bree-landers, who seemed to have been in the Shire several times, wanted to know where the Underhills lived and who they were related to. Suddenly Frodo noticed that a strange-looking weather-beaten man, sitting in the shadows near the wall, was also listening intently to the hobbit-talk. He had a tall tankard in front of him, and was smoking a long-stemmed pipe curiously carved. His legs were stretched out before him, showing high boots of supple leather that fitted him well, but had seen much wear and were now caked with mud. A travel-stained cloak of heavy dark-green cloth was drawn close about him, and in spite of the heat of the room he wore a hood that overshadowed his face; but the gleam of his eyes could be seen as he watched the hobbits. 'Who is that?' Frodo asked, when he got a chance to whisper to Mr Butterbur. 'I don't think you introduced him?' 'Him?' said the landlord in an answering whisper, cocking an eye without turning his head. 'I don't rightly know. He is one of the wandering folk – Rangers we call them. He seldom talks: not but what he can tell a rare tale when he has the mind. He disappears for a month, or a year, and then he pops up again. He was in and out pretty often last spring; but I haven't seen him about lately. What his right name is I've never heard: but he's known round here as Strider. Goes about at a great pace on his long shanks; though he don't tell nobody what cause he has to hurry. But there's no accounting for East and West, as we say in Bree, meaning the Rangers and the Shire-folk, begging your pardon. Funny you should ask about him'. But at that moment Mr Butterbur was called away by a demand for more ale and his last remark remained unexplained. Frodo found that Strider was now looking at him, as if he had heard or guessed all that had been said. Presently, with a wave of his hand and a nod, he invited Frodo to come over and sit by him. As Frodo drew near he threw back his hood, showing a shaggy head of dark hair flecked with grey, and in a pale stern face a pair of keen grey eyes. 'I am called Strider,' he said in a low voice. 'I am very pleased to meet you, Master – Underhill, if old Butterbur got your name right'. 'He did,' said Frodo stiffly. He felt far from comfortable under the stare of those keen eyes. 'Well, Master Underhill,' said Strider, 'if I were you, I should stop your young friends from talking too much. Drink, fire, and chance-meeting are pleasant enough, but, well – this isn't the Shire. There are queer folk about. Though I say it as shouldn't, you may think,' he added with a wry smile, seeing Frodo's glance. 'And there have been even stranger travellers through Bree lately,' he went on, watching Frodo's face. Frodo returned his gaze but said nothing; and Strider made no further sign. His attention seemed suddenly to be fixed on Pippin. To his alarm Frodo became aware that the ridiculous young Took, encouraged by his success with the fat Mayor of Michel Delving, was now actually giving a comic account of Bilbo's farewell party. He was already giving an imitation of the Speech, and was drawing near to the astonishing Disappearance. Frodo was annoyed. It was a harmless enough tale for most of the local hobbits, no doubt: just a funny story about those funny people away beyond the River; but some (old Butterbur, for instance) knew a thing or two, and had probably heard rumours long ago about Bilbo's vanishing. It would bring the name of Baggins to their minds, especially if there had been inquiries in Bree after that name. Frodo fidgeted, wondering what to do. Pippin was evidently much enjoying the attention he was getting, and had become quite forgetful of their danger. Frodo had a sudden fear that in his present mood he might even mention the Ring; and that might well be disastrous. 'You had better do

something quick!’ whispered Strider in his ear. Frodo jumped up and stood on a table, and began to talk. The attention of Pippin’s audience was disturbed. Some of the hobbits looked at Frodo and laughed and clapped, thinking that Mr Underhill had taken as much ale as was good for him. Frodo suddenly felt very foolish, and found himself (as was his habit when making a speech) fingering the things in his pocket. He felt the Ring on its chain, and quite unaccountably the desire came over him to slip it on and vanish out of the silly situation. It seemed to him, somehow, as if the suggestion came to him from outside, from someone or something in the room. He resisted the temptation firmly, and clasped the Ring in his hand, as if to keep a hold on it and prevent it from escaping or doing any mischief. At any rate it gave him no inspiration. He spoke ‘a few suitable words’, as they would have said in the Shire: We are all very much gratified by the kindness of your reception, and I venture to hope that my brief visit will help to renew the old ties of friendship between the Shire and Bree; and then he hesitated and coughed. Everyone in the room was now looking at him. ‘A song!’ shouted one of the hobbits. ‘A song! A song!’ shouted all the others. ‘Come on now, master, sing us something that we haven’t heard before!’ For a moment Frodo stood gaping. Then in desperation he began a ridiculous song that Bilbo had been rather fond of (and indeed rather proud of, for he had made up the words himself). It was about an inn; and that is probably why it came into Frodo’s mind just then. Here it is in full. Only a few words of it are now, as a rule, remembered. There is an inn, a merry old inn beneath an old grey hill, And there they brew a beer so brown That the Man in the Moon himself came down one night to drink his fill. The ostler has a tipsy cat that plays a five-stringed fiddle; And up and down he runs his bow, Now squeaking high, now purring low, now sawing in the middle. The landlord keeps a little dog that is mighty fond of jokes; When there’s good cheer among the guests, He cocks an ear at all the jests and laughs until he chokes. They also keep a horned cow as proud as any queen; But music turns her head like ale, And makes her wave her tufted tail and dance upon the green. And O! the rows of silver dishes and the store of silver spoons! For Sunday there’s a special pair, And these they polish up with care on Saturday afternoons. The Man in the Moon was drinking deep, and the cat began to wail; A dish and a spoon on the table danced, The cow in the garden madly pranced, and the little dog chased his tail. The Man in the Moon took another mug, and then rolled beneath his chair; And there he dozed and dreamed of ale, Till in the sky the stars were pale, and dawn was in the air. Then the ostler said to his tipsy cat: ‘The white horses of the Moon, They neigh and champ their silver bits; But their master’s been and drowned his wits, and the Sun’ll be rising soon!’ So the cat on his fiddle played hey-diddle-diddle, a jig that would wake the dead: He squeaked and sawed and quickened the tune, While the landlord shook the Man in the Moon: ‘It’s after three!’ he said. They rolled the Man slowly up the hill and bundled him into the Moon, While his horses galloped up in rear, And the cow came capering like a deer, and a dish ran up with the spoon. See note 2, III, p. 1462 Now quicker the fiddle went deedle-dum-diddle; the dog began to roar, The cow and the horses stood on their heads; The guests all bounded from their beds and danced upon the floor. With a ping and a pong the fiddle-strings broke! the cow jumped over the Moon, And the little dog laughed to see such fun, And the Saturday dish went off at a run with the silver Sunday spoon. The round Moon rolled behind the hill as the Sun raised up her head. She hardly believed her fiery eyes; For though it was day, to her surprise they all went back to bed! There was loud and long applause. Frodo had a good voice, and the song tickled their fancy. ‘Where’s old Barley?’ they cried. ‘He ought to hear this. Bob ought to learn his cat the fiddle, and then we’d have a dance’. They called for more ale, and began to shout: ‘Let’s have it again, master! Come on now! Once

more!’ They made Frodo have another drink, and then begin his song again, while many of them joined in; for the tune was well known, and they were quick at picking up words. It was now Frodo’s turn to feel pleased with himself. He capered about on the table; and when he came a second time to the cow jumped over the Moon, he leaped in the air. Much too vigorously; for he came down, bang, into a tray full of mugs, and slipped, and rolled off the table with a crash, clatter, and bump! The audience all opened their mouths wide for laughter, and stopped short in gaping silence; for the singer Elves (and Hobbits) always refer to the Sun as She. disappeared. He simply vanished, as if he had gone slap through the floor without leaving a hole! The local hobbits stared in amazement, and then sprang to their feet and shouted for Barliman. All the company drew away from Pippin and Sam, who found themselves left alone in a corner, and eyed darkly and doubtfully from a distance. It was plain that many people regarded them now as the companions of a travelling magician of unknown powers and purpose. But there was one swarthy Bree-lander, who stood looking at them with a knowing and half-mocking expression that made them feel very uncomfortable. Presently he slipped out of the door, followed by the squint-eyed southerner: the two had been whispering together a good deal during the evening. Frodo felt a fool. Not knowing what else to do, he crawled away under the tables to the dark corner by Strider, who sat unmoved, giving no sign of his thoughts. Frodo leaned back against the wall and took off the Ring. How it came to be on his finger he could not tell. He could only suppose that he had been handling it in his pocket while he sang, and that somehow it had slipped on when he stuck out his hand with a jerk to save his fall. For a moment he wondered if the Ring itself had not played him a trick; perhaps it had tried to reveal itself in response to some wish or command that was felt in the room. He did not like the looks of the men that had gone out. ‘Well?’ said Strider, when he reappeared. ‘Why did you do that? Worse than anything your friends could have said! You have put your foot in it! Or should I say your finger?’ ‘I don’t know what you mean,’ said Frodo, annoyed and alarmed. ‘Oh yes, you do,’ answered Strider; ‘but we had better wait until the uproar has died down. Then, if you please, Mr Baggins, I should like a quiet word with you’. ‘What about?’ asked Frodo, ignoring the sudden use of his proper name. ‘A matter of some importance – to us both,’ answered Strider, looking Frodo in the eye. ‘You may hear something to your advantage’. ‘Very well,’ said Frodo, trying to appear unconcerned. ‘I’ll talk to you later’. Meanwhile an argument was going on by the fireplace. Mr Butterbur had come trotting in, and he was now trying to listen to several conflicting accounts of the event at the same time. ‘I saw him, Mr Butterbur,’ said a hobbit; ‘or leastways I didn’t see him, if you take my meaning. He just vanished into thin air, in a manner of speaking’. ‘You don’t say, Mr Mugwort!’ said the landlord, looking puzzled. ‘Yes I do!’ replied Mugwort. ‘And I mean what I say, what’s more’. ‘There’s some mistake somewhere,’ said Butterbur, shaking his head. ‘There was too much of that Mr Underhill to go vanishing into thin air; or into thick air, as is more likely in this room’. ‘Well, where is he now?’ cried several voices. ‘How should I know? He’s welcome to go where he will, so long as he pays in the morning. There’s Mr Took, now: he’s not vanished’. ‘Well, I saw what I saw, and I saw what I didn’t,’ said Mugwort obstinately. ‘And I say there’s some mistake,’ repeated Butterbur, picking up the tray and gathering up the broken crockery. ‘Of course there’s a mistake!’ said Frodo. ‘I haven’t vanished. Here I am! I’ve just been having a few words with Strider in the corner’. He came forward into the firelight; but most of the company backed away, even more perturbed than before. They were not in the least satisfied by his explanation that he had crawled away quickly under the tables after he had fallen. Most of the Hobbits and the Men of Bree went off then and there in a huff, having no fancy for further entertainment that evening. One or

two gave Frodo a black look and departed muttering among themselves. The Dwarves and the two or three strange Men that still remained got up and said good night to the landlord, but not to Frodo and his friends. Before long no one was left but Strider, who sat on, unnoticed, by the wall. Mr Butterbur did not seem much put out. He reckoned, very probably, that his house would be full again on many future nights, until the present mystery had been thoroughly discussed. 'Now what have you been doing, Mr Underhill?' he asked. 'Frightening my customers and breaking up my crocks with your acrobatics!' 'I am very sorry to have caused any trouble,' said Frodo. 'It was quite unintentional, I assure you. A most unfortunate accident'. 'All right, Mr Underhill! But if you're going to do any more tumbling, or conjuring, or whatever it was, you'd best warn folk beforehand – and warn me. We're a bit suspicious round here of anything out of the way – uncanny, if you understand me; and we don't take to it all of a sudden'. 'I shan't be doing anything of the sort again, Mr Butterbur, I promise you. And now I think I'll be getting to bed. We shall be making an early start. Will you see that our ponies are ready by eight o'clock?' 'Very good! But before you go, I should like a word with you in private, Mr Underhill. Something has just come back to my mind that I ought to tell you. I hope that you'll not take it amiss. When I've seen to a thing or two, I'll come along to your room, if you're willing'. 'Certainly!' said Frodo; but his heart sank. He wondered how many private talks he would have before he got to bed, and what they would reveal. Were these people all in league against him? He began to suspect even old Butterbur's fat face of concealing dark designs. Next day Frodo woke early, feeling refreshed and well. He walked along the terraces above the loud-flowing Bruinen and watched the pale, cool sun rise above the far mountains, and shine down, slanting through the thin silver mist; the dew upon the yellow leaves was glimmering, and the woven nets of gossamer twinkled on every bush. Sam walked beside him, saying nothing, but sniffing the air, and looking every now and again with wonder in his eyes at the great heights in the East. The snow was white upon their peaks. On a seat cut in the stone beside a turn in the path they came upon Gandalf and Bilbo deep in talk. 'Hullo! Good morning!' said Bilbo. 'Feel ready for the great council?' 'I feel ready for anything,' answered Frodo. 'But most of all I should like to go walking today and explore the valley. I should like to get into those pine-woods up there'. He pointed away far up the side of Rivendell to the north. 'You may have a chance later,' said Gandalf. 'But we cannot make any plans yet. There is much to hear and decide today'. Suddenly as they were talking a single clear bell rang out. 'That is the warning bell for ,', cried Gandalf. 'Come along now! Both you and Bilbo are wanted'. Frodo and Bilbo followed the wizard quickly along the winding path back to the house; behind them, uninvited and for the moment forgotten, trotted Sam. Gandalf led them to the porch where Frodo had found his friends the evening before. The light of the clear autumn morning was now glowing in the valley. The noise of bubbling waters came up from the foaming river-bed. Birds were singing, and a wholesome peace lay on the land. To Frodo his dangerous flight, and the rumours of the darkness growing in the world outside, already seemed only the memories of a troubled dream; but the faces that were turned to meet them as they entered were grave. Elrond was there, and several others were seated in silence about him. Frodo saw Glorfindel and Glo'in; and in a corner alone Strider was sitting, clad in his old travel-worn clothes again. Elrond drew Frodo to a seat by his side, and presented him to the company, saying: 'Here, my friends, is the hobbit, Frodo son of Drogo. Few have ever come hither through greater peril or on an errand more urgent'. He then pointed out and named those whom Frodo had not met before. There was a younger dwarf at Glo'in's side: his son Gimli. Beside Glorfindel there were several other counsellors of Elrond's household, of whom Erebor was the chief; and

with him was Galdor, an Elf from the Grey Havens who had come on an errand from Círdan the Shipwright. There was also a strange Elf clad in green and brown, Legolas, a messenger from his father, Thranduil, the King of the Elves of Northern Mirkwood. And seated a little apart was a tall man with a fair and noble face, dark-haired and grey-eyed, proud and stern of glance. He was cloaked and booted as if for a journey on horseback; and indeed though his garments were rich, and his cloak was lined with fur, they were stained with long travel. He had a collar of silver in which a single white stone was set; his locks were shorn about his shoulders. On a baldric he wore a great horn tipped with silver that now was laid upon his knees. He gazed at Frodo and Bilbo with sudden wonder. 'Here,' said Elrond, turning to Gandalf, 'is Boromir, a man from the South. He arrived in the grey morning, and seeks for counsel. I have bidden him to be present, for here his questions will be answered'. Not all that was spoken and debated in the Council need now be told. Much was said of events in the world outside, especially in the South, and in the wide lands east of the Mountains. Of these things Frodo had already heard many rumours; but the tale of Glo'in was new to him, and when the dwarf spoke he listened attentively. It appeared that amid the splendour of their works of hand the hearts of the Dwarves of the Lonely Mountain were troubled. 'It is now many years ago,' said Glo'in, 'that a shadow of disquiet fell upon our people. Whence it came we did not at first perceive. Words began to be whispered in secret: it was said that we were hemmed in a narrow place, and that greater wealth and splendour would be found in a wider world. Some spoke of Moria: the mighty works of our fathers that are called in our own tongue Khazad-du'm; and they declared that now at last we had the power and numbers to return'. Glo'in sighed. 'Moria! Moria! Wonder of the Northern world! Too deep we delved there, and woke the nameless fear. Long have its vast mansions lain empty since the children of Durin fled. But now we spoke of it again with longing, and yet with dread; for no dwarf has dared to pass the doors of Khazad-du'm for many lives of kings, save Thro'r only, and he perished. At last, however, Balin listened to the whispers, and resolved to go; and though Da'in did not give leave willingly, he took with him Ori and Oin and many of our folk, and they went away south. 'That was nigh on thirty years ago. For a while we had news and it seemed good: messages reported that Moria had been entered and a great work begun there. Then there was silence, and no word has ever come from Moria since. 'Then about a year ago a messenger came to Da'in, but not from Moria – from Mordor: a horseman in the night, who called Da'in to his gate. The Lord Sauron the Great, so he said, wished for our friendship. Rings he would give for it, such as he gave of old. And he asked urgently concerning hobbits, of what kind they were, and where they dwelt. 'For Sauron knows,' said he, 'that one of these was known to you on a time'. 'At this we were greatly troubled, and we gave no answer. And then his fell voice was lowered, and he would have sweetened it if he could. 'As a small token only of your friendship Sauron asks this,' he said: 'that you should find this thief,' such was his word, 'and get from him, willing or no, a little ring, the least of rings, that once he stole. It is but a trifle that Sauron fancies, and an earnest of your good will. Find it, and three rings that the Dwarf-sires possessed of old shall be returned to you, and the realm of Moria shall be yours for ever. Find only news of the thief, whether he still lives and where, and you shall have great reward and lasting friendship from the Lord. Refuse, and things will not seem so well. Do you refuse?' 'At that his breath came like the hiss of snakes, and all who stood by shuddered, but Da'in said: 'I say neither yea nor nay. I must consider this message and what it means under its fair cloak'. 'Consider well, but not too long,' said he. 'The time of my thought is my own to spend,' answered Da'in. 'For the present,' said he, and rode into the darkness. 'Heavy have the hearts of our chieftains been since that night. We

needed not the fell voice of the messenger to warn us that his words held both menace and deceit; for we knew already that the power that has re-entered Mordor has not changed, and ever it betrayed us of old. Twice the messenger has returned, and has gone unanswered. The third and last time, so he says, is soon to come, before the ending of the year. 'And so I have been sent at last by Da'in to warn Bilbo that he is sought by the Enemy, and to learn, if may be, why he desires this ring, this least of rings. Also we crave the advice of Elrond. For the Shadow grows and draws nearer. We discover that messengers have come also to King Brand in Dale, and that he is afraid. We fear that he may yield. Already war is gathering on his eastern borders. If we make no answer, the Enemy may move Men of his rule to assail King Brand, and Da'in also'. 'You have done well to come,' said Elrond. 'You will hear today all that you need in order to understand the purposes of the Enemy. There is naught that you can do, other than to resist, with hope or without it. But you do not stand alone. You will learn that your trouble is but part of the trouble of all the western world. The Ring! What shall we do with the Ring, the least of rings, the trifle that Sauron fancies? That is the doom that we must deem. 'That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands. You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world. 'Now, therefore, things shall be openly spoken that have been hidden from all but a few until this day. And first, so that all may understand what is the peril, the Tale of the Ring shall be told from the beginning even to this present. And I will begin that tale, though others shall end it'. Then all listened while Elrond in his clear voice spoke of Sauron and the Rings of Power, and their forging in the Second Age of the world long ago. A part of his tale was known to some there, but the full tale to none, and many eyes were turned to Elrond in fear and wonder as he told of the Elven-smiths of Eregion and their friendship with Moria, and their eagerness for knowledge, by which Sauron ensnared them. For in that time he was not yet evil to behold, and they received his aid and grew mighty in craft, whereas he learned all their secrets, and betrayed them, and forged secretly in the Mountain of Fire the One Ring to be their master. But Celebrimbor was aware of him, and hid the Three which he had made; and there was war, and the land was laid waste, and the gate of Moria was shut. Then through all the years that followed he traced the Ring; but since that history is elsewhere recounted, even as Elrond himself set it down in his books of lore, it is not here recalled. For it is a long tale, full of deeds great and terrible, and briefly though Elrond spoke, the sun rode up the sky, and the morning was passing ere he ceased. Of Nu'menor he spoke, its glory and its fall, and the return of the Kings of Men to Middle-earth out of the deeps of the Sea, borne upon the wings of storm. Then Elendil the Tall and his mighty sons, Isildur and Ana'rion, became great lords; and the North-realm they made in Arnor, and the South- realm in Gondor above the mouths of Anduin. But Sauron of Mordor assailed them, and they made the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, and the hosts of Gil-galad and Elendil were mustered in Arnor. Thereupon Elrond paused a while and sighed. 'I remember well the splendour of their banners,' he said. 'It recalled to me the glory of the Elder Days and the hosts of Beleriand, so many great princes and captains were assembled. And yet not so many, nor so fair, as when Thangorodrim was broken, and the Elves deemed that evil was ended for ever, and it was not so'. 'You remember?' said Frodo, speaking his thought aloud in his astonishment. 'But I thought,' he stammered as Elrond turned towards him, 'I thought that the fall of Gil-galad was a long age ago'. 'So it was indeed,' answered Elrond gravely. 'But my memory reaches back even to the Elder Days. Ea'rendil was my sire,

who was born in Gondolin before its fall; and my mother was Elwing, daughter of Dior, son of Lu'thien of Doriath. I have seen three ages in the West of the world, and many defeats, and many fruitless victories. 'I was the herald of Gil-galad and marched with his host. I was at the Battle of Dagorlad before the Black Gate of Mordor, where we had the mastery: for the Spear of Gil-galad and the Sword of Elendil, Aeglos and Narsil, none could withstand. I beheld the last combat on the slopes of Orodruin, where Gil-galad died, and Elendil fell, and Narsil broke beneath him; but Sauron himself was overthrown, and Isildur cut the Ring from his hand with the hilt-shard of his father's sword, and took it for his own'. At this the stranger, Boromir, broke in. 'So that is what became of the Ring!' he cried. 'If ever such a tale was told in the South, it has long been forgotten. I have heard of the Great Ring of him that we do not name; but we believed that it perished from the world in the ruin of his first realm. Isildur took it! That is tidings indeed'. 'Alas! yes,' said Elrond. 'Isildur took it, as should not have been. It should have been cast then into Orodruin's fire nigh at hand where it was made. But few marked what Isildur did. He alone stood by his father in that last mortal contest; and by Gil-galad only Ci'rdan stood, and I. But Isildur would not listen to our counsel. ' "This I will have as weregild for my father, and my brother," he said; and therefore whether we would or no, he took it to treasure it. But soon he was betrayed by it to his death; and so it is named in the North Isildur's Bane. Yet death maybe was better than what else might have befallen him. 'Only to the North did these tidings come, and only to a few. Small wonder is it that you have not heard them, Boromir. From the ruin of the Gladden Fields, where Isildur perished, three men only came ever back over the mountains after long wandering. One of these was Ohtar, the esquire of Isildur, who bore the shards of the sword of Elendil; and he brought them to Valandil, the heir of Isildur, who being but a child had remained here in Rivendell. But Narsil was broken and its light extinguished, and it has not yet been forged again. 'Fruitless did I call the victory of the Last Alliance? Not wholly so, yet it did not achieve its end. Sauron was diminished, but not destroyed. His Ring was lost but not unmade. The Dark Tower was broken, but its foundations were not removed; for they were made with the power of the Ring, and while it remains they will endure. Many Elves and many mighty Men, and many of their friends, had perished in the war. Ana'rion was slain, and Isildur was slain; and Gil-galad and Elendil were no more. Never again shall there be any such league of Elves and Men; for Men multiply and the Firstborn decrease, and the two kindreds are estranged. And ever since that day the race of Nu'menor has decayed, and the span of their years has lessened. 'In the North after the war and the slaughter of the Gladden Fields the Men of Westernesse were diminished, and their city of Annu'minas beside Lake Evendim fell into ruin; and the heirs of Valandil removed and dwelt at Fornost on the high North Downs, and that now too is desolate. Men call it Deadmen's Dike, and they fear to tread there. For the folk of Arnor dwindled, and their foes devoured them, and their lordship passed, leaving only green mounds in the grassy hills. 'In the South the realm of Gondor long endured; and for a while its splendour grew, recalling somewhat of the might of Nu'menor, ere it fell. High towers that people built, and strong places, and havens of many ships; and the winged crown of the Kings of Men was held in awe by folk of many tongues. Their chief city was Osgiliath, Citadel of the Stars, through the midst of which the River flowed. And Minas Ithil they built, Tower of the Rising Moon, eastward upon a shoulder of the Mountains of Shadow; and westward at the feet of the White Mountains Minas Anor they made, Tower of the Setting Sun. There in the courts of the King grew a white tree, from the seed of that tree which Isildur brought over the deep waters, and the seed of that tree before came from Eresse'a, and before that out of the Uttermost West in the Day before days when the

world was young. 'But in the wearing of the swift years of Middle-earth the line of Meneldil son of Ana'rion failed, and the Tree withered, and the blood of the Nu'meno'reans became mingled with that of lesser men. Then the watch upon the walls of Mordor slept, and dark things crept back to Gorgoroth. And on a time evil things came forth, and they took Minas Ithil and abode in it, and they made it into a place of dread; and it is called Minas Morgul, the Tower of Sorcery. Then Minas Anor was named anew Minas Tirith, the Tower of Guard; and these two cities were ever at war, but Osgiliath which lay between was deserted and in its ruins shadows walked. 'So it has been for many lives of men. But the Lords of Minas Tirith still fight on, defying our enemies, keeping the passage of the River from Argonath to the Sea. And now that part of the tale that I shall tell is drawn to its close. For in the days of Isildur the Ruling Ring passed out of all knowledge, and the Three were released from its dominion. But now in this latter day they are in peril once more, for to our sorrow the One has been found. Others shall speak of its finding, for in that I played small part'. He ceased, but at once Boromir stood up, tall and proud, before them. 'Give me leave, Master Elrond,' said he, 'first to say more of Gondor, for verily from the land of Gondor I am come. And it would be well for all to know what passes there. For few, I deem, know of our deeds, and therefore guess little at their peril, if we should fail at last. 'Believe not that in the land of Gondor the blood of Nu'menor is spent, nor all its pride and dignity forgotten. By our valour the wild folk of the East are still restrained, and the terror of Morgul kept at bay; and thus alone are peace and freedom maintained in the lands behind us, bulwark of the West. But if the passages of the River should be won, what then? 'Yet that hour, maybe, is not now far away. The Nameless Enemy has arisen again. Smoke rises once more from Orodruin that we call Mount Doom. The power of the Black Land grows and we are hard beset. When the Enemy returned our folk were driven from Ithilien, our fair domain east of the River, though we kept a foothold there and strength of arms. But this very year, in the days of June, sudden war came upon us out of Mordor, and we were swept away. We were outnumbered, for Mordor has allied itself with the Easterlings and the cruel Haradrim; but it was not by numbers that we were defeated. A power was there that we have not felt before. 'Some said that it could be seen, like a great black horseman, a dark shadow under the moon. Wherever he came a madness filled our foes, but fear fell on our boldest, so that horse and man gave way and fled. Only a remnant of our eastern force came back, destroying the last bridge that still stood amid the ruins of Osgiliath. 'I was in the company that held the bridge, until it was cast down behind us. Four only were saved by swimming: my brother and myself and two others. But still we fight on, holding all the west shores of Anduin; and those who shelter behind us give us praise, if ever they hear our name: much praise but little help. Only from Rohan now will any men ride to us when we call. 'In this evil hour I have come on an errand over many dangerous leagues to Elrond: a hundred and ten days I have journeyed all alone. But I do not seek allies in war. The might of Elrond is in wisdom not in weapons, it is said. I come to ask for counsel and the unravelling of hard words. For on the eve of the sudden assault a dream came to my brother in a troubled sleep; and afterwards a like dream came oft to him again, and once to me. 'In that dream I thought the eastern sky grew dark and there was a growing thunder, but in the West a pale light lingered, and out of it I heard a voice, remote but clear, crying: Seek for the Sword that was broken: In Imladris it dwells; There shall be counsels taken Stronger than Morgul-spells. There shall be shown a token That Doom is near at hand, For Isildur's Bane shall waken, And the Halfling forth shall stand. Of these words we could understand little, and we spoke to our father, Denethor, Lord of Minas Tirith, wise in the lore of Gondor. This only would he say, that Imladris was of old the name among

the Elves of a far northern dale, where Elrond the Halfelven dwelt, greatest of lore-masters. Therefore my brother, seeing how desperate was our need, was eager to heed the dream and seek for Imladris; but since the way was full of doubt and danger, I took the journey upon myself. Loth was my father to give me leave, and long have I wandered by roads forgotten, seeking the house of Elrond, of which many had heard, but few knew where it lay'. 'And here in the house of Elrond more shall be made clear to you,' said Aragorn, standing up. He cast his sword upon the table that stood before Elrond, and the blade was in two pieces. 'Here is the Sword that was Broken!' he said. 'And who are you, and what have you to do with Minas Tirith?' asked Boromir, looking in wonder at the lean face of the Ranger and his weather-stained cloak. 'He is Aragorn son of Arathorn,' said Elrond; 'and he is descended through many fathers from Isildur Elendil's son of Minas Ithil. He is the Chief of the Du'nédain in the North, and few are now left of that folk'. 'Then it belongs to you, and not to me at all!' cried Frodo in amazement, springing to his feet, as if he expected the Ring to be demanded at once. 'It does not belong to either of us,' said Aragorn; 'but it has been ordained that you should hold it for a while'. 'Bring out the Ring, Frodo!' said Gandalf solemnly. 'The time has come. Hold it up, and then Boromir will understand the remainder of his riddle'. There was a hush, and all turned their eyes on Frodo. He was shaken by a sudden shame and fear; and he felt a great reluctance to reveal the Ring, and a loathing of its touch. He wished he was far away. The Ring gleamed and flickered as he held it up before them in his trembling hand. 'Behold Isildur's Bane!' said Elrond. Boromir's eyes glinted as he gazed at the golden thing. 'The Halfling!' he muttered. 'Is then the doom of Minas Tirith come at last? But why then should we seek a broken sword?' 'The words were not the doom of Minas Tirith,' said Aragorn. 'But doom and great deeds are indeed at hand. For the Sword that was Broken is the Sword of Elendil that broke beneath him when he fell. It has been treasured by his heirs when all other heirlooms were lost; for it was spoken of old among us that it should be made again when the Ring, Isildur's Bane, was found. Now you have seen the sword that you have sought, what would you ask? Do you wish for the House of Elendil to return to the Land of Gondor?' 'I was not sent to beg any boon, but to seek only the meaning of a riddle,' answered Boromir proudly. 'Yet we are hard pressed, and the Sword of Elendil would be a help beyond our hope – if such a thing could indeed return out of the shadows of the past'. He looked again at Aragorn, and doubt was in his eyes. Frodo felt Bilbo stir impatiently at his side. Evidently he was annoyed on his friend's behalf. Standing suddenly up he burst out: All that is gold does not glitter, Not all those who wander are lost; The old that is strong does not wither, Deep roots are not reached by the frost. From the ashes a fire shall be woken, A light from the shadows shall spring; Renewed shall be blade that was broken: The crownless again shall be king. 'Not very good perhaps, but to the point – if you need more beyond the word of Elrond. If that was worth a journey of a hundred and ten days to hear, you had best listen to it'. He sat down with a snort. 'I made that up myself,' he whispered to Frodo, 'for the Du'nadan, a long time ago when he first told me about himself. I almost wish that my adventures were not over, and that I could go with him when his day comes'. Aragorn smiled at him; then he turned to Boromir again. 'For my part I forgive your doubt,' he said. 'Little do I resemble the figures of Elendil and Isildur as they stand carved in their majesty in the halls of Denethor. I am but the heir of Isildur, not Isildur himself. I have had a hard life and a long; and the leagues that lie between here and Gondor are a small part in the count of my journeys. I have crossed many mountains and many rivers, and trodden many plains, even into the far countries of Rhûn and Harad where the stars are strange. 'But my home, such as I have, is in the North. For here the heirs of Valandil have ever dwelt in long line unbroken from father

unto son for many generations. Our days have darkened, and we have dwindled; but ever the Sword has passed to a new keeper. And this I will say to you, Boromir, ere I end. Lonely men are we, Rangers of the wild, hunters – but hunters ever of the servants of the Enemy; for they are found in many places, not in Mordor only. ‘If Gondor, Boromir, has been a stalwart tower, we have played another part. Many evil things there are that your strong walls and bright swords do not stay. You know little of the lands beyond your bounds. Peace and freedom, do you say? The North would have known them little but for us. Fear would have destroyed them. But when dark things come from the houseless hills, or creep from sunless woods, they fly from us. What roads would any dare to tread, what safety would there be in quiet lands, or in the homes of simple men at night, if the Du’nedain were asleep, or were all gone into the grave? ‘And yet less thanks have we than you. Travellers scowl at us, and countrymen give us scornful names. “Strider” I am to one fat man who lives within a day’s march of foes that would freeze his heart, or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so. That has been the task of my kindred, while the years have lengthened and the grass has grown. ‘But now the world is changing once again. A new hour comes. Isildur’s Bane is found. Battle is at hand. The Sword shall be reforged. I will come to Minas Tirith’. ‘Isildur’s Bane is found, you say,’ said Boromir. ‘I have seen a bright ring in the Halfling’s hand; but Isildur perished ere this age of the world began, they say. How do the Wise know that this ring is his? And how has it passed down the years, until it is brought hither by so strange a messenger?’ ‘That shall be told,’ said Elrond. ‘But not yet, I beg, Master!’ cried Bilbo. ‘Already the Sun is climbing to noon, and I feel the need of something to strengthen me’. ‘I had not named you,’ said Elrond smiling. ‘But I do so now. Come! Tell us your tale. And if you have not yet cast your story into verse, you may tell it in plain words. The briefer, the sooner shall you be refreshed’. ‘Very well,’ said Bilbo. ‘I will do as you bid. But I will now tell the true story, and if some here have heard me tell it otherwise’ – he looked sidelong at Glo‘in – ‘I ask them to forget it and forgive me. I only wished to claim the treasure as my very own in those days, and to be rid of the name of thief that was put on me. But perhaps I understand things a little better now. Anyway, this is what happened’. To some there Bilbo’s tale was wholly new, and they listened with amazement while the old hobbit, actually not at all displeased, recounted his adventure with Gollum, at full length. He did not omit a single riddle. He would have given also an account of his party and disappearance from the Shire, if he had been allowed; but Elrond raised his hand. ‘Well told, my friend,’ he said, ‘but that is enough at this time. For the moment it suffices to know that the Ring passed to Frodo, your heir. Let him now speak!’ Then, less willingly than Bilbo, Frodo told of all his dealings with the Ring from the day that it passed into his keeping. Every step of his journey from Hobbiton to the Ford of Bruinen was questioned and considered, and everything that he could recall concerning the Black Riders was examined. At last he sat down again. ‘Not bad,’ Bilbo said to him. ‘You would have made a good story of it, if they hadn’t kept on interrupting. I tried to make a few notes, but we shall have to go over it all again together some time, if I am to write it up. There are whole ‘Yes, it made quite a long tale,’ answered Frodo. ‘But the story still does not seem complete to me. I still want to know a good deal, especially about Gandalf’. Galdor of the Havens, who sat nearby, overheard him. ‘You speak for me also,’ he cried, and turning to Elrond he said: ‘The Wise may have good reason to believe that the halfling’s trove is indeed the Great Ring of long debate, unlikely though that may seem to those who know less. But may we not hear the proofs? And I would ask this also. What of Saruman? He is learned in the lore

of the Rings, yet he is not among us. What is his counsel – if he knows the things that we have heard?’ ‘The questions that you ask, Galdor, are bound together,’ said Elrond. ‘I had not overlooked them, and they shall be answered. But these things it is the part of Gandalf to make clear; and I call upon him last, for it is the place of honour, and in all this matter he has been the chief’. ‘Some, Galdor,’ said Gandalf, ‘would think the tidings of Glo’in, and the pursuit of Frodo, proof enough that the halfling’s trove is a thing of great worth to the Enemy. Yet it is a ring. What then? The Nine the Nazgu^l keep. The Seven are taken or destroyed’. At this Glo’in stirred, but did not speak. ‘The Three we know of. What then is this one that he desires so much? ‘There is indeed a wide waste of time between the River and the Mountain, between the loss and the finding. But the gap in the knowledge of the Wise has been filled at last. Yet too slowly. For the Enemy has been close behind, closer even than I feared. And well is it that not until this year, this very summer, as it seems, did he learn the full truth. ‘Some here will remember that many years ago I myself dared to pass the doors of the Necromancer in Dol Guldur, and secretly explored his ways, and found thus that our fears were true: he was none other than Sauron, our Enemy of old, at length taking shape and power again. Some, too, will remember also that Saruman dissuaded us from open deeds against him, and for long we watched him only. Yet at last, as his shadow grew, Saruman yielded, and the Council put forth its strength and drove the evil out of Mirkwood – and that was in the very year of the finding of this Ring: a strange chance, if chance it was. ‘But we were too late, as Elrond foresaw. Sauron also had watched us, and had long prepared against our stroke, governing Mordor from afar through Minas Morgul, where his Nine servants dwelt, until all was ready. Then he gave way before us, but only feigned to flee, and soon after came to the Dark Tower and openly declared himself. Then for the last time the Council met; for now we learned that he was seeking ever more eagerly for the One. We feared then that he had some news of it that we knew nothing of. But Saruman said nay, and repeated what he had said to us before: that the One would never again be found in Middle-earth. ‘ “At the worst,” said he, “our Enemy knows that we have it not, and that it still is lost. But what was lost may yet be found, he thinks. Fear not! His hope will cheat him. Have I not earnestly studied this matter? Into Anduin the Great it fell; and long ago, while Sauron slept, it was rolled down the River to the Sea. There let it lie until the End’. ’ Gandalf fell silent, gazing eastward from the porch to the far peaks of the Misty Mountains, at whose great roots the peril of the world had so long lain hidden. He sighed. ‘There I was at fault,’ he said. ‘I was lulled by the words of Saruman the Wise; but I should have sought for the truth sooner, and our peril would now be less’. ‘We were all at fault,’ said Elrond, ‘and but for your vigil- ance the Darkness, maybe, would already be upon us. But say on!’ ‘From the first my heart misgave me, against all reason that I knew,’ said Gandalf, ‘and I desired to know how this thing came to Gollum, and how long he had possessed it. So I set a watch for him, guessing that he would ere long come forth from his darkness to seek for his treasure. He came, but he escaped and was not found. And then alas! I let the matter rest, watching and waiting only, as we have too often done. ‘Time passed with many cares, until my doubts were awak- ened again to sudden fear. Whence came the hobbit’s ring? What, if my fear was true, should be done with it? Those things I must decide. But I spoke yet of my dread to none, knowing the peril of an untimely whisper, if it went astray. In all the long wars with the Dark Tower treason has ever been our greatest foe. ‘That was seventeen years ago. Soon I became aware that spies of many sorts, even beasts and birds, were gathered round the Shire, and my fear grew. I called for the help of the Du’nedain, and their watch was doubled; and I opened my heart to Aragorn, the heir of Isildur’. ‘And I,’ said Aragorn, ‘counselled that we should hunt for Gollum, too

late though it may seem. And since it seemed fit that Isildur's heir should labour to repair Isildur's fault, I went with Gandalf on the long and hopeless search'. Then Gandalf told how they had explored the whole length of Wilderland, down even to the Mountains of Shadow and the fences of Mordor. 'There we had rumour of him, and we guess that he dwelt there long in the dark hills; but we never found him, and at last I despaired. And then in my despair I thought again of a test that might make the finding of Gollum unneeded. The ring itself might tell if it were the One. The memory of words at the Council came back to me: words of Saruman, half-heeded at the time. I heard them now clearly in my heart. ' "The Nine, the Seven, and the Three," he said, "had each their proper gem. Not so the One. It was round and unadorned, as it were one of the lesser rings; but its maker set marks upon it that the skilled, maybe, could still see and read". 'What those marks were he had not said. Who now would know? The maker. And Saruman? But great though his lore may be, it must have a source. What hand save Sauron's ever held this thing, ere it was lost? The hand of Isildur alone. 'With that thought, I forsook the chase, and passed swiftly to Gondor. In former days the members of my order had been well received there, but Saruman most of all. Often he had been for long the guest of the Lords of the City. Less welcome did the Lord Denethor show me then than of old, and grudgingly he permitted me to search among his hoarded scrolls and books. ' "If indeed you look only, as you say, for records of ancient days, and the beginnings of the City, read on!" he said. "For to me what was is less dark than what is to come, and that is my care. But unless you have more skill even than Saruman, who has studied here long, you will find naught that is not well known to me, who am master of the lore of this City". 'So said Denethor. And yet there lie in his hoards many records that few even of the lore-masters now can read, for their scripts and tongues have become dark to later men. And Boromir, there lies in Minas Tirith still, unread, I guess, by any save Saruman and myself since the kings failed, a scroll that Isildur made himself. For Isildur did not march away straight from the war in Mordor, as some have told the tale'. 'Some in the North, maybe,' Boromir broke in. 'All know in Gondor that he went first to Minas Anor and dwelt a while with his nephew Meneldil, instructing him, before he committed to him the rule of the South Kingdom. In that time he planted there the last sapling of the White Tree in memory of his brother'. 'But in that time also he made this scroll,' said Gandalf; 'and that is not remembered in Gondor, it would seem. For this scroll concerns the Ring, and thus wrote Isildur therein: The Great Ring shall go now to be an heirloom of the North Kingdom; but records of it shall be left in Gondor, where also dwell the heirs of Elendil, lest a time come when the memory of these great matters shall grow dim. 'And after these words Isildur described the Ring, such as he found it. It was hot when I first took it, hot as a glede, and my hand was scorched, so that I doubt if ever again I shall be free of the pain of it. Yet even as I write it is cooled, and it seemeth to shrink, though it loseth neither its beauty nor its shape. Already the writing upon it, which at first was as clear as red flame, fadeth and is now only barely to be read. It is fashioned in an elven-script of Eregion, for they have no letters in Mordor for such subtle work; but the language is unknown to me. I deem it to be a tongue of the Black Land, since it is foul and uncouth. What evil it saith I do not know; but I trace here a copy of it, lest it fade beyond recall. The Ring misseth, maybe, the heat of Sauron's hand, which was black and yet burned like fire, and so Gil-galad was destroyed; and maybe were the gold made hot again, the writing would be refreshed. But for my part I will risk no hurt to this thing: of all the works of Sauron the only fair. It is precious to me, though I buy it with great pain. 'When I read these words, my quest was ended. For the traced writing was indeed as Isildur guessed, in the tongue of Mordor and the servants of the Tower. And what was

said therein was already known. For in the day that Sauron first put on the One, Celebrimbor, maker of the Three, was aware of him, and from afar he heard him speak these words, and so his evil purposes were revealed. 'At once I took my leave of Denethor, but even as I went northwards, messages came to me out of Lo'rien that Aragorn had passed that way, and that he had found the creature called Gollum. Therefore I went first to meet him and hear his tale. Into what deadly perils he had gone alone I dared not guess'. 'There is little need to tell of them,' said Aragorn. 'If a man must needs walk in sight of the Black Gate, or tread the deadly flowers of Morgul Vale, then perils he will have. I, too, despaired at last, and I began my homeward journey. And then, by fortune, I came suddenly on what I sought: the marks of soft feet beside a muddy pool. But now the trail was fresh and swift, and it led not to Mordor but away. Along the skirts of the Dead Marshes I followed it, and then I had him. Lurking by a stagnant mere, peering in the water as the dark eve fell, I caught him, Gollum. He was covered with green slime. He will never love me, I fear; for he bit me, and I was not gentle. Nothing more did I ever get from his mouth than the marks of his teeth. I deemed it the worst part of all my journey, the road back, watching him day and night, making him walk before me with a halter on his neck, gagged, until he was tamed by lack of drink and food, driving him ever towards Mirkwood. I brought him there at last and gave him to the Elves, for we had agreed that this should be done; and I was glad to be rid of his company, for he stank. For my part I hope never to look upon him again; but Gandalf came and endured long speech with him'. 'Yes, long and weary,' said Gandalf, 'but not without profit. For one thing, the tale he told of his loss agreed with that which Bilbo has now told openly for the first time; but that mattered little, since I had already guessed it. But I learned then first that Gollum's ring came out of the Great River nigh to the Gladden Fields. And I learned also that he had possessed it long. Many lives of his small kind. The power of the ring had lengthened his years far beyond their span; but that power only the Great Rings wield. 'And if that is not proof enough, Galdor, there is the other test that I spoke of. Upon this very ring which you have here seen held aloft, round and unadorned, the letters that Isildur reported may still be read, if one has the strength of will to set the golden thing in the fire a while. That I have done, and this I have read: Ash nazg durbatulu`k, ash nazg gimbatul, ash nazg thrakatulu`k agh burzum-ishi krimpatul'. The change in the wizard's voice was astounding. Suddenly it became menacing, powerful, harsh as stone. A shadow seemed to pass over the high sun, and the porch for a moment grew dark. All trembled, and the Elves stopped their ears. 'Never before has any voice dared to utter words of that tongue in Imladris, Gandalf the Grey,' said Elrond, as the shadow passed and the company breathed once more. 'And let us hope that none will ever speak it here again,' answered Gandalf. 'Nonetheless I do not ask your pardon, Master Elrond. For if that tongue is not soon to be heard in every corner of the West, then let all put doubt aside that this thing is indeed what the Wise have declared: the treasure of the Enemy, fraught with all his malice; and in it lies a great part of his strength of old. Out of the Black Years come the words that the Smiths of Eregion heard, and knew that they had been betrayed: One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the Darkness bind them. 'Know also, my friends, that I learned more yet from Gollum. He was loth to speak and his tale was unclear, but it is beyond all doubt that he went to Mordor, and there all that he knew was forced from him. Thus the Enemy knows now that the One is found, that it was long in the Shire; and since his servants have pursued it almost to our door, he soon will know, already he may know, even as I speak, that we have it here'. All sat silent for a while, until at length Boromir spoke. 'He is a small thing, you say, this Gollum? Small, but great in mischief. What became of him? To what doom did you

put him?’ ‘He is in prison, but no worse,’ said Aragorn. ‘He had suffered much. There is no doubt that he was tormented, and the fear of Sauron lies black on his heart. Still I for one am glad that he is safely kept by the watchful Elves of Mirkwood. His malice is great and gives him a strength hardly to be believed in one so lean and withered. He could work much mischief still, if he were free. And I do not doubt that he was allowed to leave Mordor on some evil errand’. ‘Alas! alas!’ cried Legolas, and in his fair Elvish face there was great distress. ‘The tidings that I was sent to bring must now be told. They are not good, but only here have I learned how evil they may seem to this company. Sme’agol, who is now called Gollum, has escaped’. ‘Escaped?’ cried Aragorn. ‘That is ill news indeed. We shall all rue it bitterly, I fear. How came the folk of Thranduil to fail in their trust?’ ‘Not through lack of watchfulness,’ said Legolas; ‘but per- haps through over-kindliness. And we fear that the prisoner had aid from others, and that more is known of our doings than we could wish. We guarded this creature day and night, at Gandalf’s bidding, much though we wearied of the task. But Gandalf bade us hope still for his cure, and we had not the heart to keep him ever in dungeons under the earth, where he would fall back into his old black thoughts’. ‘You were less tender to me,’ said Glo’in with a flash of his eyes, as old memories were stirred of his imprisonment in the deep places of the Elven-king’s halls. ‘Now come!’ said Gandalf. ‘Pray, do not interrupt, my good Glo’in. That was a regrettable misunderstanding, long set right. If all the grievances that stand between Elves and Dwarves are to be brought up here, we may as well abandon this Council’. Glo’in rose and bowed, and Legolas continued. ‘In the days of fair weather we led Gollum through the woods; and there was a high tree standing alone far from the others which he liked to climb. Often we let him mount up to the highest branches, until he felt the free wind; but we set a guard at the tree’s foot. One day he refused to come down, and the guards had no mind to climb after him: he had learned the trick of clinging to boughs with his feet as well as with his hands; so they sat by the tree far into the night. ‘It was that very night of summer, yet moonless and star- less, that Orcs came on us at unawares. We drove them off after some time; they were many and fierce, but they came from over the mountains, and were unused to the woods. When the battle was over, we found that Gollum was gone, and his guards were slain or taken. It then seemed plain to us that the attack had been made for his rescue, and that he knew of it beforehand. How that was contrived we cannot guess; but Gollum is cunning, and the spies of the Enemy are many. The dark things that were driven out in the year of the Dragon’s fall have returned in greater numbers, and Mirkwood is again an evil place, save where our realm is maintained. ‘We have failed to recapture Gollum. We came on his trail among those of many Orcs, and it plunged deep into the Forest, going south. But ere long it escaped our skill, and we dared not continue the hunt; for we were drawing nigh to Dol Guldur, and that is still a very evil place; we do not go that way’. ‘Well, well, he is gone,’ said Gandalf. ‘We have no time to seek for him again. He must do what he will. But he may play a part yet that neither he nor Sauron have foreseen. ‘And now I will answer Galdor’s other questions. What of Saruman? What are his counsels to us in this need? This tale I must tell in full, for only Elrond has heard it yet, and that in brief; but it will bear on all that we must resolve. It is the last ‘At the end of June I was in the Shire, but a cloud of anxiety was on my mind, and I rode to the southern borders of the little land; for I had a foreboding of some danger, still hidden from me but drawing near. There messages reached me tell- ing me of war and defeat in Gondor, and when I heard of the Black Shadow a chill smote my heart. But I found nothing save a few fugitives from the South; yet it seemed to me that on them sat a fear of which they would not speak. I turned then east and north and journeyed along the Greenway; and not far from Bree I

came upon a traveller sitting on a bank beside the road with his grazing horse beside him. It was Radagast the Brown, who at one time dwelt at Rhosgobel, near the borders of Mirkwood. He is one of my order, but I had not seen him for many a year. ‘ ‘Gandalf!’’ he cried. ‘ ‘I was seeking you. But I am a stranger in these parts. All I knew was that you might be found in a wild region with the uncouth name of Shire’.’ ‘ ‘Your information was correct,’ I said. ‘ ‘But do not put it that way, if you meet any of the inhabitants. You are near the borders of the Shire now. And what do you want with me? It must be pressing. You were never a traveller, unless driven by great need’.’ ‘ ‘I have an urgent errand,’ he said. ‘ ‘My news is evil’.’ Then he looked about him, as if the hedges might have ears. ‘ ‘Nazgu`l,’ he whispered. ‘ ‘The Nine are abroad again. They have crossed the River secretly and are moving westward. They have taken the guise of riders in black’.’ ‘ ‘I knew then what I had dreaded without knowing it. ‘ ‘The Enemy must have some great need or purpose,’ said Radagast; ‘ ‘but what it is that makes him look to these distant and desolate parts, I cannot guess’.’ ‘ ‘What do you mean?’’ said I. ‘ ‘I have been told that wherever they go the Riders ask for news of a land called Shire’.’ ‘ ‘The Shire,’ I said; but my heart sank. For even the Wise might fear to withstand the Nine, when they are gathered together under their fell chieftain. A great king and sorcerer he was of old, and now he wields a deadly fear. ‘ ‘Who told you, and who sent you?’’ I asked. ‘ ‘Saruman the White,’ answered Radagast. ‘ ‘And he told me to say that if you feel the need, he will help; but you must seek his aid at once, or it will be too late’.’ ‘ ‘And that message brought me hope. For Saruman the White is the greatest of my order. Radagast is, of course, a worthy Wizard, a master of shapes and changes of hue; and he has much lore of herbs and beasts, and birds are especially his friends. But Saruman has long studied the arts of the Enemy himself, and thus we have often been able to forestall him. It was by the devices of Saruman that we drove him from Dol Guldur. It might be that he had found some weapons that would drive back the Nine. ‘ ‘I will go to Saruman,’ I said. ‘ ‘Then you must go now,’ said Radagast; ‘ ‘for I have wasted time in looking for you, and the days are running short. I was told to find you before Midsummer, and that is now here. Even if you set out from this spot, you will hardly reach him before the Nine discover the land that they seek. I myself shall turn back at once’.’ And with that he mounted and would have ridden straight off. ‘ ‘Stay a moment!’’ I said. ‘ ‘We shall need your help, and the help of all things that will give it. Send out messages to all the beasts and birds that are your friends. Tell them to bring news of anything that bears on this matter to Saruman and Gandalf. Let messages be sent to Orthanc’.’ ‘ ‘I will do that,’ he said, and rode off as if the Nine were after him. ‘ ‘I could not follow him then and there. I had ridden very far already that day, and I was as weary as my horse; and I needed to consider matters. I stayed the night in Bree, and decided that I had no time to return to the Shire. Never did I make a greater mistake! ‘ ‘However, I wrote a message to Frodo, and trusted to my friend the innkeeper to send it to him. I rode away at dawn; and I came at long last to the dwelling of Saruman. That is far south in Isengard, in the end of the Misty Mountains, not far from the Gap of Rohan. And Boromir will tell you that that is a great open vale that lies between the Misty Mountains and the northmost foothills of Ered Nimrais, the White Mountains of his home. But Isengard is a circle of sheer rocks that enclose a valley as with a wall, and in the midst of that valley is a tower of stone called Orthanc. It was not made by Saruman, but by the Men of Nu`menor long ago; and it is very tall and has many secrets; yet it looks not to be a work of craft. It cannot be reached save by passing the circle of Isengard; and in that circle there is only one gate. ‘ ‘Late one evening I came to the gate, like a great arch in the wall of rock; and it was strongly guarded. But the keepers of the gate were on the watch for me and told me that Saruman awaited me. I rode under the

arch, and the gate closed silently behind me, and suddenly I was afraid, though I knew no reason for it. 'But I rode to the foot of Orthanc, and came to the stair of Saruman; and there he met me and led me up to his high chamber. He wore a ring on his finger. ' "So you have come, Gandalf," he said to me gravely; but in his eyes there seemed to be a white light, as if a cold laughter was in his heart. ' "Yes, I have come," I said. ' "I have come for your aid, Saruman the White". And that title seemed to anger him. ' "Have you indeed, Gandalf the Grey!" he scoffed. "For aid? It has seldom been heard of that Gandalf the Grey sought for aid, one so cunning and so wise, wandering about the lands, and concerning himself in every business, whether it belongs to him or not". ' I looked at him and wondered. "But if I am not deceived," said I, "things are now moving which will require the union of all our strength". ' "That may be so," he said, "but the thought is late in coming to you. How long, I wonder, have you concealed from me, the head of the Council, a matter of greatest import? What brings you now from your lurking-place in the Shire?" ' "The Nine have come forth again," I answered. "They have crossed the River. So Radagast said to me". ' "Radagast the Brown!" laughed Saruman, and he no longer concealed his scorn. "Radagast the Bird-tamer! Rada- gast the Simple! Radagast the Fool! Yet he had just the wit to play the part that I set him. For you have come, and that was all the purpose of my message. And here you will stay, Gandalf the Grey, and rest from journeys. For I am Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!" ' I looked then and saw that his robes, which had seemed white, were not so, but were woven of all colours, and if he moved they shimmered and changed hue so that the eye was bewildered. ' "I liked white better," I said. ' "White!" he sneered. "It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page can be overwritten; and the white light can be broken". ' "In which case it is no longer white," said I. "And he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom". ' "You need not speak to me as to one of the fools that you take for friends," said he. "I have not brought you hither to be instructed by you, but to give you a choice". ' He drew himself up then and began to declaim, as if he were making a speech long rehearsed. "The Elder Days are gone. The Middle Days are passing. The Younger Days are beginning. The time of the Elves is over, but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule. But we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the Wise can see. ' "And listen, Gandalf, my old friend and helper!" he said, coming near and speaking now in a softer voice. "I said we, for we it may be, if you will join with me. A new Power is rising. Against it the old allies and policies will not avail us at all. There is no hope left in Elves or dying Nu'menor. This then is one choice before you, before us. We may join with that Power. It would be wise, Gandalf. There is hope that way. Its victory is at hand; and there will be rich reward for those that aided it. As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it. We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends. There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means". ' "Saruman," I said, "I have heard speeches of this kind before, but only in the mouths of emissaries sent from Mordor to deceive the ignorant. I cannot think that you brought me so far only to weary my ears". ' He looked at me sidelong, and paused a while considering. "Well, I see that this wise course does not commend itself to you," he said. "Not yet? Not if some better way can be contrived?" ' He came and laid his long hand on my arm. "And why not, Gandalf?" he whispered. "Why not? The Ruling

Ring? If we could command that, then the Power would pass to us. That is in truth why I brought you here. For I have many eyes in my service, and I believe that you know where this precious thing now lies. Is it not so? Or why do the Nine ask for the Shire, and what is your business there?" As he said this a lust which he could not conceal shone suddenly in his eyes. "Saruman," I said, standing away from him, "only one hand at a time can wield the One, and you know that well, so do not trouble to say we! But I would not give it, nay, I would not give even news of it to you, now that I learn your mind. You were head of the Council, but you have unmasked yourself at last. Well, the choices are, it seems, to submit to Sauron, or to yourself. I will take neither. Have you others to offer?" "He was cold now and perilous. "Yes," he said. "I did not expect you to show wisdom, even in your own behalf; but I gave you the chance of aiding me willingly, and so saving yourself much trouble and pain. The third choice is to stay here, until the end". "Until what end?" "Until you reveal to me where the One may be found. I may find means to persuade you. Or until it is found in your despite, and the Ruler has time to turn to lighter matters: to devise, say, a fitting reward for the hindrance and insolence of Gandalf the Grey". "That may not prove to be one of the lighter matters," said I. He laughed at me, for my words were empty, and he knew it. "They took me and they set me alone on the pinnacle of Orthanc, in the place where Saruman was accustomed to watch the stars. There is no descent save by a narrow stair of many thousand steps, and the valley below seems far away. I looked on it and saw that, whereas it had once been green and fair, it was now filled with pits and forges. Wolves and orcs were housed in Isengard, for Saruman was mustering a great force on his own account, in rivalry of Sauron and not in his service, yet. Over all his works a dark smoke hung and wrapped itself about the sides of Orthanc. I stood alone on an island in the clouds; and I had no chance of escape, and my days were bitter. I was pierced with cold, and I had but little room in which to pace to and fro, brooding on the coming of the Riders to the North. "That the Nine had indeed arisen I felt assured, apart from the words of Saruman which might be lies. Long ere I came to Isengard I had heard tidings by the way that could not be mistaken. Fear was ever in my heart for my friends in the Shire; but still I had some hope. I hoped that Frodo had set forth at once, as my letter had urged, and that he had reached Rivendell before the deadly pursuit began. And both my fear and my hope proved ill-founded. For my hope was founded on a fat man in Bree; and my fear was founded on the cunning of Sauron. But fat men who sell ale have many calls to answer; and the power of Sauron is still less than fear makes it. But in the circle of Isengard, trapped and alone, it was not easy to think that the hunters before whom all have fled or fallen would falter in the Shire far away". "I saw you!" cried Frodo. "You were walking backwards and forwards. The moon shone in your hair". Gandalf paused astonished and looked at him. "It was only a dream," said Frodo, "but it suddenly came back to me. I had quite forgotten it. It came some time ago; after I left the Shire, I think". "Then it was late in coming," said Gandalf, "as you will see. I was in an evil plight. And those who know me will agree that I have seldom been in such need, and do not bear such misfortune well. Gandalf the Grey caught like a fly in a spider's treacherous web! Yet even the most subtle spiders may leave a weak thread. "At first I feared, as Saruman no doubt intended, that Radagast had also fallen. Yet I had caught no hint of anything wrong in his voice or in his eye at our meeting. If I had, I should never have gone to Isengard, or I should have gone more warily. So Saruman guessed, and he had concealed his mind and deceived his messenger. It would have been useless in any case to try and win over the honest Radagast to treachery. He sought me in good faith, and so persuaded me. "That was the undoing of Saruman's plot. For Radagast knew no reason why he should not do as I asked; and he rode away

towards Mirkwood where he had many friends of old. And the Eagles of the Mountains went far and wide, and they saw many things: the gathering of wolves and the mustering of Orcs; and the Nine Riders going hither and thither in the lands; and they heard news of the escape of Gollum. And they sent a messenger to bring these tidings to me. 'So it was that when summer waned, there came a night of moon, and Gwaihir the Windlord, swiftest of the Great Eagles, came unlooked-for to Orthanc; and he found me standing on the pinnacle. Then I spoke to him and he bore me away, before Saruman was aware. I was far from Isengard, ere the wolves and orcs issued from the gate to pursue me. ' "How far can you bear me?" I said to Gwaihir. ' "Many leagues," said he, "but not to the ends of the earth. I was sent to bear tidings not burdens." ' "Then I must have a steed on land," I said, "and a steed surpassingly swift, for I have never had such need of haste before." ' "Then I will bear you to Edoras, where the Lord of Rohan sits in his halls," he said; "for that is not very far off." And I was glad, for in the Riddermark of Rohan the Rohirrim, the Horse-lords, dwell, and there are no horses like those that are bred in that great vale between the Misty Mountains and the White. ' "Are the Men of Rohan still to be trusted, do you think?" I said to Gwaihir, for the treason of Saruman had shaken my faith. ' "They pay a tribute of horses," he answered, "and send many yearly to Mordor, or so it is said; but they are not yet under the yoke. But if Saruman has become evil, as you say, then their doom cannot be long delayed." ' He set me down in the land of Rohan ere dawn; and now I have lengthened my tale over long. The rest must be more brief. In Rohan I found evil already at work: the lies of Saruman; and the king of the land would not listen to my warnings. He bade me take a horse and be gone; and I chose one much to my liking, but little to his. I took the best horse in his land, and I have never seen the like of him'. 'Then he must be a noble beast indeed,' said Aragorn; 'and it grieves me more than many tidings that might seem worse to learn that Sauron levies such tribute. It was not so when last I was in that land'. 'Nor is it now, I will swear,' said Boromir. 'It is a lie that comes from the Enemy. I know the Men of Rohan, true and valiant, our allies, dwelling still in the lands that we gave them long ago'. 'The shadow of Mordor lies on distant lands,' answered Aragorn. 'Saruman has fallen under it. Rohan is beset. Who knows what you will find there, if ever you return?' 'Not this at least,' said Boromir, 'that they will buy their lives with horses. They love their horses next to their kin. And not without reason, for the horses of the Riddermark come from the fields of the North, far from the Shadow, and their race, as that of their masters, is descended from the free days of old'. 'True indeed!' said Gandalf. 'And there is one among them that might have been foaled in the morning of the world. The horses of the Nine cannot vie with him; tireless, swift as the flowing wind. Shadowfax they called him. By day his coat glistens like silver; and by night it is like a shade, and he passes unseen. Light is his footfall! Never before had any man mounted him, but I took him and I tamed him, and so speedily he bore me that I reached the Shire when Frodo was on the Barrow-downs, though I set out from Rohan only when he set out from Hobbiton. 'But fear grew in me as I rode. Ever as I came north I heard tidings of the Riders, and though I gained on them day by day, they were ever before me. They had divided their forces, I learned: some remained on the eastern borders, not far from the Greenway, and some invaded the Shire from the south. I came to Hobbiton and Frodo had gone; but I had words with old Gamgee. Many words and few to the point. He had much to say about the shortcomings of the new owners of Bag End. ' "I can't abide changes," said he, "not at my time of life, and least of all changes for the worst." ' "Changes for the worst," he repeated many times. ' "Worst is a bad word," I said to him, "and I hope you do not live to see it." ' But amidst his talk I gathered at last that Frodo had left Hobbiton less than a week before, and that a black

horseman had come to the Hill the same evening. Then I rode on in fear. I came to Buckland and found it in uproar, as busy as a hive of ants that has been stirred with a stick. I came to the house at Crickhollow, and it was broken open and empty; but on the threshold there lay a cloak that had been Frodo's. Then for a while hope left me, and I did not wait to gather news, or I might have been comforted; but I rode on the trail of the Riders. It was hard to follow, for it went many ways, and I was at a loss. But it seemed to me that one or two had ridden towards Bree; and that way I went, for I thought of words that might be said to the innkeeper. ‘“Butterbur they call him,”’ thought I. ‘“If this delay was his fault, I will melt all the butter in him. I will roast the old fool over a slow fire.”’ He expected no less, and when he saw my face he fell down flat and began to melt on the spot’. ‘What did you do to him?’ cried Frodo in alarm. ‘He was really very kind to us and did all that he could’. Gandalf laughed. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I did not bite, and I barked very little. So overjoyed was I by the news that I got out of him, when he stopped quaking, that I embraced the old fellow. How it had happened I could not then guess, but I learned that you had been in Bree the night before, and had gone off that morning with Strider. ‘“Strider!”’ I cried, shouting for joy. ‘“Yes, sir, I am afraid so, sir,”’ said Butterbur, mistaking me. ‘He got at them, in spite of all that I could do, and they took up with him. They behaved very queer all the time they were here: wilful, you might say’.’ ‘“Ass! Fool! Thrice worthy and beloved Barliman!”’ said I. ‘It’s the best news I have had since Midsummer; it’s worth a gold piece at the least. May your beer be laid under an enchantment of surpassing excellence for seven years!’’ said I. ‘Now I can take a night’s rest, the first since I have forgot- ten when’.’ ‘So I stayed there that night, wondering much what had become of the Riders; for only of two had there yet been any news in Bree, it seemed. But in the night we heard more. Five at least came from the west, and they threw down the gates and passed through Bree like a howling wind; and the Bree-folk are still shivering and expecting the end of the world. I got up before dawn and went after them. ‘I do not know, but it seems clear to me that this is what happened. Their Captain remained in secret away south of Bree, while two rode ahead through the village, and four more invaded the Shire. But when these were foiled in Bree and at Crickhollow, they returned to their Captain with tid- ings, and so left the Road unguarded for a while, except by their spies. The Captain then sent some eastward straight across country, and he himself with the rest rode along the Road in great wrath. ‘I galloped to Weathertop like a gale, and I reached it before sundown on my second day from Bree – and they were there before me. They drew away from me, for they felt the coming of my anger and they dared not face it while the Sun was in the sky. But they closed round at night, and I was besieged on the hill-top, in the old ring of Amon Su^l. I was hard put to it indeed: such light and flame cannot have been seen on Weathertop since the war-beacons of old. ‘At sunrise I escaped and fled towards the north. I could not hope to do more. It was impossible to find you, Frodo, in the wilderness, and it would have been folly to try with all the Nine at my heels. So I had to trust to Aragorn. But I hoped to draw some of them off, and yet reach Rivendell ahead of you and send out help. Four Riders did indeed follow me, but they turned back after a while and made for the Ford, it seems. That helped a little, for there were only five, not nine, when your camp was attacked. ‘I reached here at last by a long hard road, up the Hoarwell and through the Ettenmoors, and down from the north. It took me nearly fifteen days from Weathertop, for I could not ride among the rocks of the troll-fells, and Shadowfax departed. I sent him back to his master; but a great friendship has grown between us, and if I have need he will come at my call. But so it was that I came to Rivendell only two days before the Ring, and news of its peril had already been brought here – which proved well indeed. ‘And that, Frodo, is the end of

my account. May Elrond and the others forgive the length of it. But such a thing has not happened before, that Gandalf broke tryst and did not come when he promised. An account to the Ring-bearer of so strange an event was required, I think. 'Well, the Tale is now told, from first to last. Here we all are, and here is the Ring. But we have not yet come any nearer to our purpose. What shall we do with it?' There was a silence. At last Elrond spoke again. 'This is grievous news concerning Saruman,' he said; 'for we trusted him and he is deep in all our counsels. It is perilous to study too deeply the arts of the Enemy, for good or for ill. But such falls and betrayals, alas, have happened before. Of the tales that we have heard this day the tale of Frodo was most strange to me. I have known few hobbits, save Bilbo here; and it seems to me that he is perhaps not so alone and singular as I had thought him. The world has changed much since I last was on the westward roads. 'The Barrow-wights we know by many names; and of the Old Forest many tales have been told: all that now remains is but an outlier of its northern march. Time was when a squirrel could go from tree to tree from what is now the Shire to Dunland west of Isengard. In those lands I journeyed once, and many things wild and strange I knew. But I had forgotten Bombadil, if indeed this is still the same that walked the woods and hills long ago, and even then was older than the old. That was not then his name. Iarwain Ben-adar we called him, oldest and fatherless. But many another name he has since been given by other folk: Forn by the Dwarves, Orald by Northern Men, and other names beside. He is a strange creature, but maybe I should have summoned him to our Council'. 'He would not have come,' said Gandalf. 'Could we not still send messages to him and obtain his help?' asked Erebor. 'It seems that he has a power even over the Ring'. 'No, I should not put it so,' said Gandalf. 'Say rather that the Ring has no power over him. He is his own master. But he cannot alter the Ring itself, nor break its power over others. And now he is withdrawn into a little land, within bounds that he has set, though none can see them, waiting perhaps for a change of days, and he will not step beyond them'. 'But within those bounds nothing seems to dismay him,' said Erebor. 'Would he not take the Ring and keep it there, for ever harmless?' 'No,' said Gandalf, 'not willingly. He might do so, if all the free folk of the world begged him, but he would not understand the need. And if he were given the Ring, he would soon forget it, or most likely throw it away. Such things have no hold on his mind. He would be a most unsafe guardian; and that alone is answer enough'. 'But in any case,' said Glorfindel, 'to send the Ring to him would only postpone the day of evil. He is far away. We could not now take it back to him, unguessed, unmarked by any spy. And even if we could, soon or late the Lord of the Rings would learn of its hiding place and would bend all his power towards it. Could that power be defied by Bombadil alone? I think not. I think that in the end, if all else is conquered, Bombadil will fall, Last as he was First; and then Night will come'. 'I know little of Iarwain save the name,' said Galdor; 'but Glorfindel, I think, is right. Power to defy our Enemy is not in him, unless such power is in the earth itself. And yet we see that Sauron can torture and destroy the very hills. What power still remains lies with us, here in Imladris, or with Círdan at the Havens, or in Lo'rien. But have they the strength, have we here the strength to withstand the Enemy, the coming of Sauron at the last, when all else is overthrown?' 'I have not the strength,' said Elrond; 'neither have they'. 'Then if the Ring cannot be kept from him for ever by strength,' said Glorfindel, 'two things only remain for us to attempt: to send it over the Sea, or to destroy it'. 'But Gandalf has revealed to us that we cannot destroy it by any craft that we here possess,' said Elrond. 'And they who dwell beyond the Sea would not receive it: for good or ill it belongs to Middle-earth; it is for us who still dwell here to deal with it'. 'Then,' said Glorfindel, 'let us cast it into the deeps, and so make the lies of Saruman come true. For it is clear

now that even at the Council his feet were already on a crooked path. He knew that the Ring was not lost for ever, but wished us to think so; for he began to lust for it for himself. Yet oft in lies truth is hidden: in the Sea it would be safe'. 'Not safe for ever,' said Gandalf. 'There are many things in the deep waters; and seas and lands may change. And it is not our part here to take thought only for a season, or for a few lives of Men, or for a passing age of the world. We should seek a final end of this menace, even if we do not hope to make one'. 'And that we shall not find on the roads to the Sea,' said Galdor. 'If the return to Iarwain be thought too dangerous, then flight to the Sea is now fraught with gravest peril. My heart tells me that Sauron will expect us to take the western way, when he learns what has befallen. He soon will. The Nine have been unhorsed indeed, but that is but a respite, ere they find new steeds and swifter. Only the waning might of Gondor stands now between him and a march in power along the coasts into the North; and if he comes, assailing the White Towers and the Havens, hereafter the Elves may have no escape from the lengthening shadows of Middle-earth'. 'Long yet will that march be delayed,' said Boromir. 'Gondor wanes, you say. But Gondor stands, and even the end of its strength is still very strong'. 'And yet its vigilance can no longer keep back the Nine,' said Galdor. 'And other roads he may find that Gondor does not guard'. 'Then,' said Erestor, 'there are but two courses, as Glorfindel already has declared: to hide the Ring for ever; or to unmake it. But both are beyond our power. Who will read this riddle for us?' 'None here can do so,' said Elrond gravely. 'At least none can foretell what will come to pass, if we take this road or that. But it seems to me now clear which is the road that we must take. The westward road seems easiest. Therefore it must be shunned. It will be watched. Too often the Elves have fled that way. Now at this last we must take a hard road, a road unforeseen. There lies our hope, if hope it be. To walk into peril – to Mordor. We must send the Ring to the Fire'. Silence fell again. Frodo, even in that fair house, looking out upon a sunlit valley filled with the noise of clear waters, felt a dead darkness in his heart. Boromir stirred, and Frodo looked at him. He was fingering his great horn and frowning. At length he spoke. 'I do not understand all this,' he said. 'Saruman is a traitor, but did he not have a glimpse of wisdom? Why do you speak ever of hiding and destroying? Why should we not think that the Great Ring has come into our hands to serve us in the very hour of need? Wielding it the Free Lords of the Free may surely defeat the Enemy. That is what he most fears, I deem. 'The Men of Gondor are valiant, and they will never submit; but they may be beaten down. Valour needs first strength, and then a weapon. Let the Ring be your weapon, if it has such power as you say. Take it and go forth to victory!' 'Alas, no,' said Elrond. 'We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well. It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. Consider Saruman. If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise. For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so. I fear to take the Ring to hide it. I will not take the Ring to wield it'. 'Nor I,' said Gandalf. Boromir looked at them doubtfully, but he bowed his head. 'So be it,' he said. 'Then in Gondor we must trust to such weapons as we have. And at the least, while the Wise ones guard this Ring, we will fight on. Mayhap the Sword-that- was-Broken may still stem the tide – if the hand that wields it has inherited not an heirloom only, but the sinews of the Kings of Men'. 'Who can tell?' said Aragorn. 'But we will put it to the test one day'.

‘May the day not be too long delayed,’ said Boromir. ‘For though I do not ask for aid, we need it. It would comfort us to know that others fought also with all the means that they have’. ‘Then be comforted,’ said Elrond. ‘For there are other powers and realms that you know not, and they are hidden from you. Anduin the Great flows past many shores, ere it comes to Argonath and the Gates of Gondor’. ‘Still it might be well for all,’ said Glo’in the Dwarf, ‘if all these strengths were joined, and the powers of each were used in league. Other rings there may be, less treacherous, that might be used in our need. The Seven are lost to us – if Balin has not found the ring of Thro’r, which was the last; naught has been heard of it since Thro’r perished in Moria. Indeed I may now reveal that it was partly in hope to find that ring that Balin went away’. ‘Balin will find no ring in Moria,’ said Gandalf. ‘Thro’r gave it to Thra’in his son, but not Thra’in to Thorin. It was taken with torment from Thra’in in the dungeons of Dol Guldur. I came too late’. ‘Ah, alas!’ cried Glo’in. ‘When will the day come of our revenge? But still there are the Three. What of the Three Rings of the Elves? Very mighty Rings, it is said. Do not the Elf-lords keep them? Yet they too were made by the Dark Lord long ago. Are they idle? I see Elf-lords here. Will they not say?’ The Elves returned no answer. ‘Did you not hear me, Glo’in?’ said Elrond. ‘The Three were not made by Sauron, nor did he ever touch them. But of them it is not permitted to speak. So much only in this hour of doubt I may now say. They are not idle. But they were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power. Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained. These things the Elves of Middle-earth have in some measure gained, though with sorrow. But all that has been wrought by those who wield the Three will turn to their undoing, and their minds and hearts will become revealed to Sauron, if he regains the One. It would be better if the Three had never been. That is his purpose’. ‘But what then would happen, if the Ruling Ring were destroyed, as you counsel?’ asked Glo’in. ‘We know not for certain,’ answered Elrond sadly. ‘Some hope that the Three Rings, which Sauron has never touched, would then become free, and their rulers might heal the hurts of the world that he has wrought. But maybe when the One has gone, the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten. That is my belief’. ‘Yet all the Elves are willing to endure this chance,’ said Glorfindel, ‘if by it the power of Sauron may be broken, and the fear of his dominion be taken away for ever’. ‘Thus we return once more to the destroying of the Ring,’ said Erebor, ‘and yet we come no nearer. What strength have we for the finding of the Fire in which it was made? That is the path of despair. Of folly I would say, if the long wisdom of Elrond did not forbid me’. ‘Despair, or folly?’ said Gandalf. ‘It is not despair, for despair is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt. We do not. It is wisdom to recognize necessity, when all other courses have been weighed, though as folly it may appear to those who cling to false hope. Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy! For he is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it. If we seek this, we shall put him out of reckoning’. ‘At least for a while,’ said Elrond. ‘The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere’. ‘Very well, very well, Master Elrond!’ said Bilbo suddenly. ‘Say no more! It is plain enough what you are pointing at. Bilbo the silly hobbit started this affair, and Bilbo had better finish it, or himself. I was very comfortable here, and getting on with

my book. If you want to know, I am just writing an ending for it. I had thought of putting: and he lived happily ever afterwards to the end of his days. It is a good ending, and none the worse for having been used before. Now I shall have to alter that: it does not look like coming true; and anyway there will evidently have to be several more to write them. It is a frightful nuisance. When ought I to start?' Boromir looked in surprise at Bilbo, but the laughter died on his lips when he saw that all the others regarded the old hobbit with grave respect. Only Glo'in smiled, but his smile came from old memories. 'Of course, my dear Bilbo,' said Gandalf. 'If you had really started this affair, you might be expected to finish it. But you know well enough now that starting is too great a claim for any, and that only a small part is played in great deeds by any hero. You need not bow! Though the word was meant, and we do not doubt that under jest you are making a valiant offer. But one beyond your strength, Bilbo. You cannot take this thing back. It has passed on. If you need my advice any longer, I should say that your part is ended, unless as a recorder. Finish your book, and leave the ending unaltered! There is still hope for it. But get ready to write a sequel, when they come back'. Bilbo laughed. 'I have never known you give me pleasant advice before,' he said. 'As all your unpleasant advice has been good, I wonder if this advice is not bad. Still, I don't suppose I have the strength or luck left to deal with the Ring. It has grown, and I have not. But tell me: what do you mean by they?' 'The messengers who are sent with the Ring'. 'Exactly! And who are they to be? That seems to me what this Council has to decide, and all that it has to decide. Elves may thrive on speech alone, and Dwarves endure great weariness; but I am only an old hobbit, and I miss my meal at noon. Can't we think of some names now? Or put it off till after dinner?' No one answered. The noon-bell rang. Still no one spoke. Frodo glanced at all the faces, but they were not turned to him. All the Council sat with downcast eyes, as if in deep thought. A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice. 'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way'. Elrond raised his eyes and looked at him, and Frodo felt his heart pierced by the sudden keenness of the glance. 'If I understand aright all that I have heard,' he said, 'I think that this task is appointed for you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will. This is the hour of the Shire-folk, when they arise from their quiet fields to shake the towers and counsels of the Great. Who of all the Wise could have foreseen it? Or, if they are wise, why should they expect to know it, until the hour has struck? 'But it is a heavy burden. So heavy that none could lay it on another. I do not lay it on you. But if you take it freely, I will say that your choice is right; and though all the mighty Elf-friends of old, Hador, and Hu'rin, and Tu'rin, and Beren himself were assembled together, your seat should be among them'. 'But you won't send him off alone surely, Master?' cried Sam, unable to contain himself any longer, and jumping up from the corner where he had been quietly sitting on the floor. 'No indeed!' said Elrond, turning towards him with a smile. 'You at least shall go with him. It is hardly possible to separate you from him, even when he is summoned to a secret council and you are not'. Sam sat down, blushing and muttering. 'A nice pickle we have landed ourselves in, Mr Frodo!' he said, shaking his head. 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 cracked 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 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. Flo'i was killed by an arrow. He slew the great. Then there is a blur followed by Flo'i 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 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 Oin 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, but 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. Fra'r and Lo'ni and Na'li fell there. Then there are four lines smeared so that I can only read went 5 days ago. The last lines run the pool is up to the wall at Westgate. The Watcher in the Water took Oin. 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 Da'in, 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 twenty-first of the North-end. Therefore we should leave by the eastern arch of the hall, and bear right and south, and go downwards. The Twenty-first 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 drum-beat 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'. '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, Anduril. 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. 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, Andu'rîl 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. 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 no 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 drum-beats 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 drum-beats 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 drum-beats 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 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 gha'sh: 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 back-wards 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 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?’ ‘Gha[^]sh!’ 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 growing 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 tower- ing 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 drum-beat: 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 drum-beats, 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 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 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 Udu^n. 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 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 drum-beats 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 drum-beats: 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 drum-beats faded. 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 ever-moving leaves countless lights were gleaming, green and gold and silver. 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 Lo'rien. 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 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 sound- lessly;

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 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 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 Glo'in! 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 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 Lo'rien'. '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 fell'. '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? 'Dark is the water of Kheled-zâram, and cold are the springs of Kibil-na'la, and fair were the many-pillared halls of Khazad-dûm in Elder Days before the fall of mighty kings beneath the stone'. She looked upon Gimli, who sat glowering and sad, and she smiled. And the Dwarf, hearing the names given in his own ancient tongue, looked up and met her eyes; and it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding. Wonder came into his face, and then he smiled in answer. He rose clumsily and bowed in dwarf-fashion, saying: 'Yet more fair is the living land of Lo'rien, and the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!' There was a silence. At length Celeborn spoke again. 'I did not know that your plight was so evil,' he said. 'Let Gimli forget my harsh words: I spoke in the trouble of my heart. I will do what I can to aid you, each according to his wish and need, but especially that one of the little folk who bears the burden'. 'Your quest is known to us,' said Galadriel, looking at Frodo. 'But we will not here speak of it more openly. Yet not in vain will it prove, maybe, that you came to this land seeking aid, as Gandalf himself plainly purposed. For the Lord of the Galadhrim is accounted the wisest of the Elves of Middle-earth, and a giver of gifts beyond the power of kings. He has dwelt in the West since the days of dawn, and I have dwelt with

him years uncounted; for ere the fall of Nargothrond or Gondolin I passed over the mountains, and together through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat. 'I it was who first summoned the White Council. And if my designs had not gone amiss, it would have been governed by Gandalf the Grey, and then mayhap things would have gone otherwise. But even now there is hope left. I will not give you counsel, saying do this, or do that. For not in doing or contriving, nor in choosing between this course and another, can I avail; but only in knowing what was and is, and in part also what shall be. But this I will say to you: your Quest stands upon the edge of a knife. Stray but a little and it will fail, to the ruin of all. Yet hope remains while all the Company is true'. And with that word she held them with her eyes, and in silence looked searchingly at each of them in turn. None save Legolas and Aragorn could long endure her glance. Sam quickly blushed and hung his head. At length the Lady Galadriel released them from her eyes, and she smiled. 'Do not let your hearts be troubled,' she said. 'Tonight you shall sleep in peace'. Then they sighed and felt suddenly weary, as those who have been questioned long and deeply, though no words had been spoken openly. 'Go now!' said Celeborn. 'You are worn with sorrow and much toil. Even if your Quest did not concern us closely, you should have refuge in this City, until you were healed and refreshed. Now you shall rest, and we will not speak of your further road for a while'. That night the Company slept upon the ground, much to the satisfaction of the hobbits. The Elves spread for them a pavilion among the trees near the fountain, and in it they laid soft couches; then speaking words of peace with fair Elvish voices they left them. For a little while the travellers talked of their night before in the tree-tops, and of their day's journey, and of the Lord and Lady; for they had not yet the heart to look further back. 'What did you blush for, Sam?' said Pippin. 'You soon broke down. Anyone would have thought you had a guilty conscience. I hope it was nothing worse than a wicked plot to steal one of my blankets'. 'I never thought no such thing,' answered Sam, in no mood for jest. 'If you want to know, I felt as if I hadn't got nothing on, and I didn't like it. She seemed to be looking inside me and asking me what I would do if she gave me the chance of flying back home to the Shire to a nice little hole with – with a bit of garden of my own'. 'That's funny,' said Merry. 'Almost exactly what I felt myself; only, only well, I don't think I'll say any more,' he ended lamely. All of them, it seemed, had fared alike: each had felt that he was offered a choice between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired: clear before his mind it lay, and to get it he had only to turn aside from the road and leave the Quest and the war against Sauron to others. 'And it seemed to me, too,' said Gimli, 'that my choice would remain secret and known only to myself'. 'To me it seemed exceedingly strange,' said Boromir. 'Maybe it was only a test, and she thought to read our thoughts for her own good purpose; but almost I should have said that she was tempting us, and offering what she pretended to have the power to give. It need not be said that I refused to listen. The Men of Minas Tirith are true to their word'. But what he thought that the Lady had offered him Boromir did not tell. And as for Frodo, he would not speak, though Boromir pressed him with questions. 'She held you long in her gaze, Ring-bearer,' he said. 'Yes,' said Frodo; 'but whatever came into my mind then I will keep there'. 'Well, have a care!' said Boromir. 'I do not feel too sure of this Elvish Lady and her purposes'. 'Speak no evil of the Lady Galadriel!' said Aragorn sternly. 'You know not what you say. There is in her and in this land no evil, unless a man bring it hither himself. Then let him beware! But tonight I shall sleep without fear for the first time since I left Rivendell. And may I sleep deep, and forget for a while my grief! I am weary in body and in heart'. He cast himself down upon his couch and fell at once into a long sleep. The others soon did the same, and no sound or dream disturbed their slumber. When

they woke they found that the light of day was broad upon the lawn before the pavilion, and the fountain rose and fell glittering in the sun. They remained some days in Lothlórien, so far as they could tell or remember. All the while that they dwelt there the sun shone clear, save for a gentle rain that fell at times, and passed away leaving all things fresh and clean. The air was cool and soft, as if it were early spring, yet they felt about them the deep and thoughtful quiet of winter. It seemed to them that they did little but eat and drink and rest, and walk among the trees; and it was enough. They had not seen the Lord and Lady again, and they had little speech with the Elven-folk; for few of these knew or would use the Westron tongue. Haldir had bidden them fare- well and gone back again to the fences of the North, where great watch was now kept since the tidings of Moria that the Company had brought. Legolas was away much among the Galadhrim, and after the first night he did not sleep with the other companions, though he returned to eat and talk with them. Often he took Gimli with him when he went abroad in the land, and the others wondered at this change. Now as the companions sat or walked together they spoke of Gandalf, and all that each had known and seen of him came clear before their minds. As they were healed of hurt and weariness of body the grief of their loss grew more keen. Often they heard nearby Elvish voices singing, and knew that they were making songs of lamentation for his fall, for they caught his name among the sweet sad words that they could not understand. Mithrandir, Mithrandir sang the Elves, O Pilgrim Grey! For so they loved to call him. But if Legolas was with the Company, he would not interpret the songs for them, saying that he had not the skill, and that for him the grief was still too near, a matter for tears and not yet for song. It was Frodo who first put something of his sorrow into halting words. He was seldom moved to make song or rhyme; even in Rivendell he had listened and had not sung himself, though his memory was stored with many things that others had made before him. But now as he sat beside the fountain in Lo'rien and heard about him the voices of the Elves, his thought took shape in a song that seemed fair to him; yet when he tried to repeat it to Sam only snatches remained, faded as a handful of withered leaves. When evening in the Shire was grey his footsteps on the Hill were heard; before the dawn he went away on journey long without a word. From Wilderland to Western shore, from northern waste to southern hill, through dragon-lair and hidden door and darkling woods he walked at will. With Dwarf and Hobbit, Elves and Men, with mortal and immortal folk, with bird on bough and beast in den, in their own secret tongues he spoke. A deadly sword, a healing hand, a back that bent beneath its load; a trumpet-voice, a burning brand, a weary pilgrim on the road. A lord of wisdom throned he sat, swift in anger, quick to laugh; an old man in a battered hat who leaned upon a thorny staff. He stood upon the bridge alone and Fire and Shadow both defied; his staff was broken on the stone, in Khazad-du'm his wisdom died. 'Why, you'll be beating Mr Bilbo next!' said Sam. 'No, I am afraid not,' said Frodo. 'But that is the best I can do yet'. 'Well, Mr Frodo, if you do have another go, I hope you'll say a word about his fireworks,' said Sam. 'Something like this: The finest rockets ever seen: they burst in stars of blue and green, or after thunder golden showers came falling like a rain of flowers. Though that doesn't do them justice by a long road'. 'No, I'll leave that to you, Sam. Or perhaps to Bilbo. But – well, I can't talk of it any more. I can't bear to think of bringing the news to him'. One evening Frodo and Sam were walking together in the cool twilight. Both of them felt restless again. On Frodo suddenly the shadow of parting had fallen: he knew somehow that the time was very near when he must leave Lothlórien. 'What do you think of Elves now, Sam?' he said. 'I asked you the same question once before – it seems a very long while ago; but you have seen more of them since then'. 'I have indeed!' said Sam. 'And I reckon there's Elves and Elves. They're all Elvish enough,

but they're not all the same. Now these folk aren't wanderers or homeless, and seem a bit nearer to the likes of us: they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say, if you take my meaning. It's wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to. If there's any magic about, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking'. 'You can see and feel it everywhere,' said Frodo. 'Well,' said Sam, 'you can't see nobody working it. No fireworks like poor old Gandalf used to show. I wonder we don't see nothing of the Lord and Lady in all these days. I fancy now that she could do some wonderful things, if she had a mind. I'd dearly love to see some Elf-magic, Mr Frodo!' 'I wouldn't,' said Frodo. 'I am content. And I don't miss Gandalf's fireworks, but his bushy eyebrows, and his quick temper, and his voice'. 'You're right,' said Sam. 'And don't think I'm finding fault. I've often wanted to see a bit of magic like what it tells of in old tales, but I've never heard of a better land than this. It's like being at home and on a holiday at the same time, if you understand me. I don't want to leave. All the same, I'm beginning to feel that if we've got to go on, then we'd best get it over. 'It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish, as my old gaffer used to say. And I don't reckon that these folk can do much more to help us, magic or no. It's when we leave this land that we shall miss Gandalf worse, I'm thinking'. 'I am afraid that's only too true, Sam,' said Frodo. 'Yet I hope very much that before we leave we shall see the Lady of the Elves again'. Even as he spoke, they saw, as if she came in answer to their words, the Lady Galadriel approaching. Tall and white and fair she walked beneath the trees. She spoke no word, but beckoned to them. Turning aside, she led them towards the southern slopes of the hill of Caras Galadhon, and passing through a high green hedge they came into an enclosed garden. No trees grew there, and it lay open to the sky. The evening star had risen and was shining with white fire above the western woods. Down a long flight of steps the Lady went into the deep green hollow, through which ran murmuring the silver stream that issued from the fountain on the hill. At the bottom, upon a low pedestal carved like a branching tree, stood a basin of silver, wide and shallow, and beside it stood a silver ewer. With water from the stream Galadriel filled the basin to the brim, and breathed on it, and when the water was still again she spoke. 'Here is,' she said. 'I have brought you here so that you may look in it, if you will'. The air was very still, and the dell was dark, and the Elf-lady beside him was tall and pale. 'What shall we look for, and what shall we see?' asked Frodo, filled with awe. 'Many things I can command the Mirror to reveal,' she answered, 'and to some I can show what they desire to see. But the Mirror will also show things unbidden, and those are often stranger and more profitable than things which we wish to behold. What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be. But which it is that he sees, even the wisest cannot always tell. Do you wish to look?' Frodo did not answer. 'And you?' she said, turning to Sam. 'For this is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy. But this, if you will, is the magic of Galadriel. Did you not say that you wished to see Elf-magic?' 'I did,' said Sam, trembling a little between fear and curiosity. 'I'll have a peep, Lady, if you're willing. 'And I'd not mind a glimpse of what's going on at home,' he said in an aside to Frodo. 'It seems a terrible long time that I've been away. But there, like as not I'll only see the stars, or something that I won't understand'. 'Like as not,' said the Lady with a gentle laugh. 'But come, you shall look and see what you may. Do not touch the water!' Sam climbed up on the foot of the pedestal and leaned over the basin. The water looked hard and dark. Stars were reflected in it. 'There's only

stars, as I thought,' he said. Then he gave a low gasp, for the stars went out. As if a dark veil had been withdrawn, the Mirror grew grey, and then clear. There was sun shining, and the branches of trees were waving and tossing in the wind. But before Sam could make up his mind what it was that he saw, the light faded; and now he thought he saw Frodo with a pale face lying fast asleep under a great dark cliff. Then he seemed to see himself going along a dim passage, and climbing an endless winding stair. It came to him suddenly that he was looking urgently for something, but what it was he did not know. Like a dream the vision shifted and went back, and he saw the trees again. But this time they were not so close, and he could see what was going on: they were not waving in the wind, they were falling, crashing to the ground. 'Hi!' cried Sam in an outraged voice. 'There's that Ted Sandyman a-cutting down trees as he shouldn't. They didn't ought to be felled: it's that avenue beyond the Mill that shades the road to Bywater. I wish I could get at Ted, and I'd fell him!' But now Sam noticed that the Old Mill had vanished, and a large red-brick building was being put up where it had stood. Lots of folk were busily at work. There was a tall red chimney nearby. Black smoke seemed to cloud the surface of the Mirror. 'There's some devilry at work in the Shire,' he said. 'Elrond knew what he was about when he wanted to send Mr Merry back'. Then suddenly Sam gave a cry and sprang away. 'I can't stay here,' he said wildly. 'I must go home. They've dug up Bagshot Row, and there's the poor old Gaffer going down the Hill with his bits of things on a barrow. I must go home!' 'You cannot go home alone,' said the Lady. 'You did not wish to go home without your master before you looked in the Mirror, and yet you knew that evil things might well be happening in the Shire. Remember that the Mirror shows many things, and not all have yet come to pass. Some never come to be, unless those that behold the visions turn aside from their path to prevent them. The Mirror is dangerous as a guide of deeds'. Sam sat on the ground and put his head in his hands. 'I wish I had never come here, and I don't want to see no more magic,' he said and fell silent. After a moment he spoke again thickly, as if struggling with tears. 'No, I'll go home by the long road with Mr Frodo, or not at all,' he said. 'But I hope I do get back some day. If what I've seen turns out true, somebody's going to catch it hot!' 'Do you now wish to look, Frodo?' said the Lady Galadriel. 'You did not wish to see Elf-magic and were content'. 'Do you advise me to look?' asked Frodo. 'No,' she said. 'I do not counsel you one way or the other. I am not a counsellor. You may learn something, and whether what you see be fair or evil, that may be profitable, and yet it may not. Seeing is both good and perilous. Yet I think, Frodo, that you have courage and wisdom enough for the venture, or I would not have brought you here. Do as you will!' 'I will look,' said Frodo, and he climbed on the pedestal and bent over the dark water. At once the Mirror cleared and he saw a twilight land. Mountains loomed dark in the distance against a pale sky. A long grey road wound back out of sight. Far away a figure came slowly down the road, faint and small at first, but growing larger and clearer as it approached. Suddenly Frodo realized that it reminded him of Gandalf. He almost called aloud the wizard's name, and then he saw that the figure was clothed not in grey but in white, in a white that shone faintly in the dusk; and in its hand there was a white staff. The head was so bowed that he could see no face, and presently the figure turned aside round a bend in the road and went out of the Mirror's view. Doubt came into Frodo's mind: was this a vision of Gandalf on one of his many lonely journeys long ago, or was it Saruman? The vision now changed. Brief and small but very vivid he caught a glimpse of Bilbo walking restlessly about his room. The table was littered with disordered papers; rain was beating on the windows. Then there was a pause, and after it many swift scenes followed that Frodo in some way knew to be parts of a great history in which he had become involved. The mist cleared

and he saw a sight which he had never seen before but knew at once: the Sea. Darkness fell. The sea rose and raged in a great storm. Then he saw against the Sun, sinking blood-red into a wrack of clouds, the black outline of a tall ship with torn sails riding up out of the West. Then a wide river flowing through a populous city. Then a white fortress with seven towers. And then again a ship with black sails, but now it was morning again, and the water rippled with light, and a banner bearing the emblem of a white tree shone in the sun. A smoke as of fire and battle arose, and again the sun went down in a burning red that faded into a grey mist; and into the mist a small ship passed away, twinkling with lights. It vanished, and Frodo sighed and prepared to draw away. But suddenly the Mirror went altogether dark, as dark as if a hole had opened in the world of sight, and Frodo looked into emptiness. In the black abyss there appeared a single Eye that slowly grew, until it filled nearly all the Mirror. So terrible was it that Frodo stood rooted, unable to cry out or to withdraw his gaze. The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing. Then the Eye began to rove, searching this way and that; and Frodo knew with certainty and horror that among the many things that it sought he himself was one. But he also knew that it could not see him – not yet, not unless he willed it. The Ring that hung upon its chain about his neck grew heavy, heavier than a great stone, and his head was dragged downwards. The Mirror seemed to be growing hot and curls of steam were rising from the water. He was slipping forward. 'Do not touch the water!' said the Lady Galadriel softly. The vision faded, and Frodo found that he was looking at the cool stars twinkling in the silver basin. He stepped back shaking all over and looked at the Lady. 'I know what it was that you last saw,' she said; 'for that is also in my mind. Do not be afraid! But do not think that only by singing amid the trees, nor even by the slender arrows of elven-bows, is this land of Lothlórien maintained and defended against its Enemy. I say to you, Frodo, that even as I speak to you, I perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind, or all of his mind that concerns the Elves. And he gropes ever to see me and my thought. But still the door is closed!' She lifted up her white arms, and spread out her hands towards the East in a gesture of rejection and denial. Eärendil, the Evening Star, most beloved of the Elves, shone clear above. So bright was it that the figure of the Elven-lady cast a dim shadow on the ground. Its rays glanced upon a ring about her finger; it glittered like polished gold overlaid with silver light, and a white stone in it twinkled as if the Evening-star had come down to rest upon her hand. Frodo gazed at the ring with awe; for suddenly it seemed to him that he understood. 'Yes,' she said, divining his thought, 'it is not permitted to speak of it, and Elrond could not do so. But it cannot be hidden from the Ring-bearer, and one who has seen the Eye. Verily it is in the land of Lo'rien upon the finger of Galadriel that one of the Three remains. This is Nenya, the Ring of Adamant, and I am its keeper. 'He suspects, but he does not know – not yet. Do you not see now wherefore your coming is to us as the footstep of Doom? For if you fail, then we are laid bare to the Enemy. Yet if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten'. Frodo bent his head. 'And what do you wish?' he said at last. 'That what should be shall be,' she answered. 'The love of the Elves for their land and their works is deeper than the deeps of the Sea, and their regret is undying and cannot ever wholly be assuaged. Yet they will cast all away rather than submit to Sauron: for they know him now. For the fate of Lothlórien you are not answerable, but only for the doing of your own task. Yet I could wish, were it of any avail, that the One Ring had never been wrought, or had remained for ever lost'. 'You are wise and fearless and fair, Lady Galadriel,' said Frodo.

‘I will give you the One Ring, if you ask for it. It is too great a matter for me’. Galadriel laughed with a sudden clear laugh. ‘Wise the Lady Galadriel may be,’ she said, ‘yet here she has met her match in courtesy. Gently are you revenged for my testing of your heart at our first meeting. You begin to see with a keen eye. I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp. The evil that was devised long ago works on in many ways, whether Sauron himself stands or falls. Would not that have been a noble deed to set to the credit of his Ring, if I had taken it by force or fear from my guest? ‘And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!’ She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illumined her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad. ‘I pass the test,’ she said. ‘I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel’. They stood for a long while in silence. At length the Lady spoke again. ‘Let us return!’ she said. ‘In the morning you must depart, for now we have chosen, and the tides of fate are flowing’. ‘I would ask one thing before we go,’ said Frodo, ‘a thing which I often meant to ask Gandalf in Rivendell. I am permitted to wear the One Ring: why cannot I see all the others and know the thoughts of those that wear them?’ ‘You have not tried,’ she said. ‘Only thrice have you set the Ring upon your finger since you knew what you possessed. Do not try! It would destroy you. Did not Gandalf tell you that the rings give power according to the measure of each possessor? Before you could use that power you would need to become far stronger, and to train your will to the domination of others. Yet even so, as Ring-bearer and as one that has borne it on finger and seen that which is hidden, your sight is grown keener. You have perceived my thought more clearly than many that are accounted wise. You saw the Eye of him that holds the Seven and the Nine. And did you not see and recognize the ring upon my finger? Did you see my ring?’ she asked turning again to Sam. ‘No, Lady,’ he answered. ‘To tell you the truth, I wondered what you were talking about. I saw a star through your fingers. But if you’ll pardon my speaking out, I think my master was right. I wish you’d take his Ring. You’d put things to rights. You’d stop them digging up the Gaffer and turning him adrift. You’d make some folk pay for their dirty work’. ‘I would,’ she said. ‘That is how it would begin. But it would not stop with that, alas! We will not speak more of it. Let us go!’ Frodo was roused by Sam. He found that he was lying, well wrapped, under tall grey-skinned trees in a quiet corner of the woodlands on the west bank of , Anduin. He had slept the night away, and the grey of morning was dim among the bare branches. Gimli was busy with a small fire near at hand. They started again before the day was broad. Not that most of the Company were eager to hurry southwards: they were content that the decision, which they must make at latest when they came to Rauros and the Tindrock Isle, still lay some days ahead; and they let the River bear them on at its own pace, having no desire to hasten towards the perils that lay beyond, whichever course they took in the end. Aragorn let them drift with the stream as they wished, husbanding their strength against weariness to come. But he insisted that at least they should start early each day and journey on far into the evening; for he felt in his heart that time was pressing, and he feared that the Dark Lord had not

been idle while they lingered in Lo'rien. Nonetheless they saw no sign of any enemy that day, nor the next. The dull grey hours passed without event. As the third day of their voyage wore on the lands changed slowly: the trees thinned and then failed altogether. On the eastern bank to their left they saw long formless slopes stretching up and away towards the sky; brown and withered they looked, as if fire had passed over them, leaving no living blade of green: an unfriendly waste without even a broken tree or a bold stone to relieve the emptiness. They had come to the Brown Lands that lay, vast and desolate, between Southern Mirkwood and the hills of the Eryn Muil. What pestilence or war or evil deed of the Enemy had so blasted all that region even Aragorn could not tell. Upon the west to their right the land was treeless also, but it was flat, and in many places green with wide plains of grass. On this side of the River they passed forests of great reeds, so tall that they shut out all view to the west, as the little boats went rustling by along their fluttering borders. Their dark withered plumes bent and tossed in the light cold airs, hissing softly and sadly. Here and there through openings Frodo could catch sudden glimpses of rolling meads, and far beyond them hills in the sunset, and away on the edge of sight a dark line, where marched the southernmost ranks of the Misty Mountains. There was no sign of living moving things, save birds. Of these there were many: small fowl whistling and piping in the reeds, but they were seldom seen. Once or twice the travellers heard the rush and whine of swan-wings, and looking up they saw a great phalanx streaming along the sky. 'Swans!' said Sam. 'And mighty big ones too!' 'Yes,' said Aragorn, 'and they are black swans'. 'How wide and empty and mournful all this country looks!' said Frodo. 'I always imagined that as one journeyed south it got warmer and merrier, until winter was left behind for ever'. 'But we have not journeyed far south yet,' answered Aragorn. 'It is still winter, and we are far from the sea. Here the world is cold until the sudden spring, and we may yet have snow again. Far away down in the Bay of Belfalas, to which Anduin runs, it is warm and merry, maybe, or would be but for the Enemy. But here we are not above sixty leagues, I guess, south of the Southfarthing away in your Shire, hundreds of long miles yonder. You are looking now south-west across the north plains of the Riddermark, Rohan the land of the Horse-lords. Ere long we shall come to the mouth of the Limlight that runs down from Fangorn to join the Great River. That is the north boundary of Rohan; and of old all that lay between Limlight and the White Mountains belonged to the Rohirrim. It is a rich and pleasant land, and its grass has no rival; but in these evil days folk do not dwell by the River or ride often to its shores. Anduin is wide, yet the orcs can shoot their arrows far across the stream; and of late, it is said, they have dared to cross the water and raid the herds and studs of Rohan'. Sam looked from bank to bank uneasily. The trees had seemed hostile before, as if they harboured secret eyes and lurking dangers; now he wished that the trees were still there. He felt that the Company was too naked, afloat in little open boats in the midst of shelterless lands, and on a river that was the frontier of war. In the next day or two, as they went on, borne steadily southwards, this feeling of insecurity grew on all the Company. For a whole day they took to their paddles and hastened forward. The banks slid by. Soon the River broadened and grew more shallow; long stony beaches lay upon the east, and there were gravel-shoals in the water, so that careful steering was needed. The Brown Lands rose into bleak wolds, over which flowed a chill air from the East. On the other side the meads had become rolling downs of withered grass amidst a land of fen and tussock. Frodo shivered, thinking of the lawns and fountains, the clear sun and gentle rains of Lothlo'rien. There was little speech and no laughter in any of the boats. Each member of the Company was busy with his own thoughts. The heart of Legolas was running under the stars of a summer night in some northern glade amid the beech-woods; Gimli

was fingering gold in his mind, and wondering if it were fit to be wrought into the housing of the Lady's gift. Merry and Pippin in the middle boat were ill at ease, for Boromir sat muttering to himself, sometimes biting his nails, as if some restlessness or doubt consumed him, sometimes seizing a paddle and driving the boat close behind Aragorn's. Then Pippin, who sat in the bow looking back, caught a queer gleam in his eye, as he peered forward gazing at Frodo. Sam had long ago made up his mind that, though boats were maybe not as dangerous as he had been brought up to believe, they were far more uncomfortable than even he had imagined. He was cramped and miserable, having nothing to do but stare at the winter-lands crawling by and the grey water on either side of him. Even when the paddles were in use they did not trust Sam with one. As dusk drew down on the fourth day, he was looking back over the bowed heads of Frodo and Aragorn and the following boats; he was drowsy and longed for camp and the feel of earth under his toes. Suddenly something caught his sight: at first he stared at it listlessly, then he sat up and rubbed his eyes; but when he looked again he could not see it any more. That night they camped on a small eyot close to the western bank. Sam lay rolled in blankets beside Frodo. 'I had a funny dream an hour or two before we stopped, Mr Frodo,' he said. 'Or maybe it wasn't a dream. Funny it was anyway'. 'Well, what was it?' said Frodo, knowing that Sam would not settle down until he had told his tale, whatever it was. 'I haven't seen or thought of anything to make me smile since we left Lothlórien'. 'It wasn't funny that way, Mr Frodo. It was queer. All wrong, if it wasn't a dream. And you had best hear it. It was like this: I saw a log with eyes!' 'The log's all right,' said Frodo. 'There are many in the River. But leave out the eyes!' 'That I won't,' said Sam. 'Twas the eyes as made me sit up, so to speak. I saw what I took to be a log floating along in the half-light behind Gimli's boat; but I didn't give much heed to it. Then it seemed as if the log was slowly catching us up. And that was peculiar, as you might say, seeing as we were all floating on the stream together. Just then I saw the eyes: two pale sort of points, shiny-like, on a hump at the near end of the log. What's more, it wasn't a log, for it had paddle-feet, like a swan's almost, only they seemed bigger, and kept dipping in and out of the water. 'That's when I sat right up and rubbed my eyes, meaning to give a shout, if it was still there when I had rubbed the drowse out of my head. For the whatever-it-was was coming along fast now and getting close behind Gimli. But whether those two lamps spotted me moving and staring, or whether I came to my senses, I don't know. When I looked again, it wasn't there. Yet I think I caught a glimpse, with the tail of my eye, as the saying is, of something dark shooting under the shadow of the bank. I couldn't see no more eyes, though. 'I said to myself: "dreaming again, Sam Gamgee," I said; and I said no more just then. But I've been thinking since, and now I'm not so sure. What do you make of it, Mr Frodo?' 'I should make nothing of it but a log and the dusk and sleep in your eyes, Sam,' said Frodo, 'if this was the first time that those eyes had been seen. But it isn't. I saw them away back north before we reached Lo'rien. And I saw a strange creature with eyes climbing to the flet that night. Haldir saw it too. And do you remember the report of the Elves that went after the orc-band?' 'Ah,' said Sam, 'I do; and I remember more too. I don't like my thoughts; but thinking of one thing and another, and Mr Bilbo's stories and all, I fancy I could put a name on the creature, at a guess. A nasty name. Gollum, maybe?' 'Yes, that is what I have feared for some time,' said Frodo. 'Ever since the night on the flet. I suppose he was lurking in Moria, and picked up our trail then; but I hoped that our stay in Lo'rien would throw him off the scent again. The miserable creature must have been hiding in the woods by the Silverlode, watching us start off!' 'That's about it,' said Sam. 'And we'd better be a bit more watchful ourselves, or we'll feel some nasty fingers round our necks one of these

nights, if we ever wake up to feel anything. And that's what I was leading up to. No need to trouble Strider or the others tonight. I'll keep watch. I can sleep tomorrow, being no more than luggage in a boat, as you might say'. 'I might,' said Frodo, 'and I might say "luggage with eyes"'. You shall watch; but only if you promise to wake me half-way towards morning, if nothing happens before then'. In the dead hours Frodo came out of a deep dark sleep to find Sam shaking him. 'It's a shame to wake you,' whispered Sam, 'but that's what you said. There's nothing to tell, or not much. I thought I heard some soft plashing and a sniffing noise, a while back; but you hear a lot of such queer sounds by a river at night'. He lay down, and Frodo sat up, huddled in his blankets, and fought off his sleep. Minutes or hours passed slowly, and nothing happened. Frodo was just yielding to the temptation to lie down again when a dark shape, hardly visible, floated close to one of the moored boats. A long whitish hand could be dimly seen as it shot out and grabbed the gunwale; two pale lamplike eyes shone coldly as they peered inside, and then they lifted and gazed up at Frodo on the eyot. They were not more than a yard or two away, and Frodo heard the soft hiss of intaken breath. He stood up, drawing Sting from its sheath, and faced the eyes. Immediately their light was shut off. There was another hiss and a splash, and the dark log-shape shot away downstream into the night. Aragorn stirred in his sleep, turned over, and sat up. 'What is it?' he whispered, springing up and coming to Frodo. 'I felt something in my sleep. Why have you drawn your sword?' 'Gollum,' answered Frodo. 'Or at least, so I guess'. 'Ah!' said Aragorn. 'So you know about our little footpad, do you? He padded after us all through Moria and right down to Nimrodel. Since we took to boats, he has been lying on a log and paddling with hands and feet. I have tried to catch him once or twice at night; but he is slier than a fox, and as slippery as a fish. I hoped the river-voyage would beat him, but he is too clever a waterman. 'We shall have to try going faster tomorrow. You lie down now, and I will keep watch for what is left of the night. I wish I could lay my hands on the wretch. We might make him useful. But if I cannot, we shall have to try and lose him. He is very dangerous. Quite apart from murder by night on his own account, he may put any enemy that is about on our track'. The night passed without Gollum showing so much as a shadow again. After that the Company kept a sharp look-out, but they saw no more of Gollum while the voyage lasted. If he was still following, he was very wary and cunning. At Aragorn's bidding they paddled now for long spells, and the banks went swiftly by. But they saw little of the country, for they journeyed mostly by night and twilight, resting by day, and lying as hidden as the land allowed. In this way the time passed without event until the seventh day. The weather was still grey and overcast, with wind from the East, but as evening drew into night the sky away westward cleared, and pools of faint light, yellow and pale green, opened under the grey shores of cloud. There the white rind of the new Moon could be seen glimmering in the remote lakes. Sam looked at it and puckered his brows. The next day the country on either side began to change rapidly. The banks began to rise and grow stony. Soon they were passing through a hilly rocky land, and on both shores there were steep slopes buried in deep brakes of thorn and sloe, tangled with brambles and creepers. Behind them stood low crumbling cliffs, and chimneys of grey weathered stone dark with ivy; and beyond these again there rose high ridges crowned with wind-writhen firs. They were drawing near to the grey hill-country of the Emyr Muil, the southern march of Wilderland. There were many birds about the cliffs and the rock- chimneys, and all day high in the air flocks of birds had been circling, black against the pale sky. As they lay in their camp that day Aragorn watched the flights doubtfully, wondering if Gollum had been doing some mischief and the news of their voyage was now moving in the wilderness. Later as the sun was setting, and the

Company was stirring and getting ready to start again, he descried a dark spot against the fading light: a great bird high and far off, now wheeling, now flying on slowly southwards. 'What is that, Legolas?' he asked, pointing to the northern sky. 'Is it, as I think, an eagle?' 'Yes,' said Legolas. 'It is an eagle, a hunting eagle. I wonder what that forebodes. It is far from the mountains'. 'We will not start until it is fully dark,' said Aragorn. The eighth night of their journey came. It was silent and windless; the grey east wind had passed away. The thin crescent of the Moon had fallen early into the pale sunset, but the sky was clear above, and though far away in the South there were great ranges of cloud that still shone faintly, in the West stars glinted bright. 'Come!' said Aragorn. 'We will venture one more journey by night. We are coming to reaches of the River that I do not know well; for I have never journeyed by water in these parts before, not between here and the rapids of Sarn Gebir. But if I am right in my reckoning, those are still many miles ahead. Still there are dangerous places even before we come there: rocks and stony eyots in the stream. We must keep a sharp watch and not try to paddle swiftly'. To Sam in the leading boat was given the task of watchman. He lay forward peering into the gloom. The night grew dark, but the stars above were strangely bright, and there was a glimmer on the face of the River. It was close on midnight, and they had been drifting for some while, hardly using the paddles, when suddenly Sam cried out. Only a few yards ahead dark shapes loomed up in the stream and he heard the swirl of racing water. There was a swift current which swung left, towards the eastern shore where the channel was clear. As they were swept aside the travellers could see, now very close, the pale foam of the River lashing against sharp rocks that were thrust out far into the stream like a ridge of teeth. The boats were all huddled together. 'Hoy there, Aragorn!' shouted Boromir, as his boat bumped into the leader. 'This is madness! We cannot dare the Rapids by night! But no boat can live in Sarn Gebir, be it night or day'. 'Back, back!' cried Aragorn. 'Turn! Turn if you can!' He drove his paddle into the water, trying to hold the boat and bring it round. 'I am out of my reckoning,' he said to Frodo. 'I did not know that we had come so far: Anduin flows faster than I thought. Sarn Gebir must be close at hand already'. With great efforts they checked the boats and slowly brought them about; but at first they could make only small headway against the current, and all the time they were carried nearer and nearer to the eastern bank. Now dark and ominous it loomed up in the night. 'All together, paddle!' shouted Boromir. 'Paddle! Or we shall be driven on the shoals'. Even as he spoke Frodo felt the keel beneath him grate upon stone. At that moment there was a twang of bowstrings: several arrows whistled over them, and some fell among them. One smote Frodo between the shoulders and he lurched forward with a cry, letting go his paddle: but the arrow fell back, foiled by his hidden coat of mail. Another passed through Aragorn's hood; and a third stood fast in the gunwale of the second boat, close by Merry's hand. Sam thought he could glimpse black figures running to and fro upon the long shingle-banks that lay under the eastern shore. They seemed very near. 'Yrch!' said Legolas, falling into his own tongue. 'Orcs!' cried Gimli. 'Gollum's doing, I'll be bound,' said Sam to Frodo. 'And a nice place to choose, too. The River seems set on taking us right into their arms!' They all leaned forward straining at the paddles: even Sam took a hand. Every moment they expected to feel the bite of black-feathered arrows. Many whined overhead or struck the water nearby; but there were no more hits. It was dark, but not too dark for the night-eyes of Orcs, and in the star-glimmer they must have offered their cunning foes some mark, unless it was that the grey cloaks of Lo'rien and the grey timber of the elf-wrought boats defeated the malice of the archers of Mordor. Stroke by stroke they laboured on. In the darkness it was hard to be sure that they were indeed moving at all; but slowly the swirl of the water grew less, and the

shadow of the eastern bank faded back into the night. At last, as far as they could judge, they had reached the middle of the stream again and had driven their boats back some distance above the jutting rocks. Then half turning they thrust them with all their strength towards the western shore. Under the shadow of bushes leaning out over the water they halted and drew breath. Legolas laid down his paddle and took up the bow that he had brought from Lo'rien. Then he sprang ashore and climbed a few paces up the bank. Stringing the bow and fitting an arrow he turned, peering back over the River into the darkness. Across the water there were shrill cries, but nothing could be seen. Frodo looked up at the Elf standing tall above him, as he gazed into the night, seeking a mark to shoot at. His head was dark, crowned with sharp white stars that glittered in the black pools of the sky behind. But now rising and sailing up from the South the great clouds advanced, sending out dark outriders into the starry fields. A sudden dread fell on the Company. 'Elbereth Gilthoniel!' sighed Legolas as he looked up. Even as he did so, a dark shape, like a cloud and yet not a cloud, for it moved far more swiftly, came out of the blackness in the South, and sped towards the Company, blotting out all light as it approached. Soon it appeared as a great winged creature, blacker than the pits in the night. Fierce voices rose up to greet it from across the water. Frodo felt a sudden chill running through him and clutching at his heart; there was a deadly cold, like the memory of an old wound, in his shoulder. He crouched down, as if to hide. Suddenly the great bow of Lo'rien sang. Shrill went the arrow from the elven-string. Frodo looked up. Almost above him the winged shape swerved. There was a harsh croaking scream, as it fell out of the air, vanishing down into the gloom of the eastern shore. The sky was clean again. There was a tumult of many voices far away, cursing and wailing in the darkness, and then silence. Neither shaft nor cry came again from the east that night. After a while Aragorn led the boats back upstream. They felt their way along the water's edge for some distance, until they found a small shallow bay. A few low trees grew there close to the water, and behind them rose a steep rocky bank. Here the Company decided to stay and await the dawn: it was useless to attempt to move further by night. They made no camp and lit no fire, but lay huddled in the boats, moored close together. 'Praised be the bow of Galadriel, and the hand and eye of Legolas!' said Gimli, as he munched a wafer of lembas. 'That was a mighty shot in the dark, my friend!' 'But who can say what it hit?' said Legolas. 'I cannot,' said Gimli. 'But I am glad that the shadow came no nearer. I liked it not at all. Too much it reminded me of the shadow in Moria – the shadow of the Balrog,' he ended in a whisper. 'It was not a Balrog,' said Frodo, still shivering with the chill that had come upon him. 'It was something colder. I think it was——' Then he paused and fell silent. 'What do you think?' asked Boromir eagerly, leaning from his boat, as if he was trying to catch a glimpse of Frodo's face. 'I think—No, I will not say,' answered Frodo. 'Whatever it was, its fall has dismayed our enemies'. 'So it seems,' said Aragorn. 'Yet where they are, and how many, and what they will do next, we do not know. This night we must all be sleepless! Dark hides us now. But what the day will show who can tell? Have your weapons close to hand!' Sam sat tapping the hilt of his sword as if he were counting on his fingers, and looking up at the sky. 'It's very strange,' he murmured. 'The Moon's the same in the Shire and in Wilderland, or it ought to be. But either it's out of its running, or I'm all wrong in my reckoning. You'll remember, Mr Frodo, the Moon was waning as we lay on the flet up in that tree: a week from the full, I reckon. And we'd been a week on the way last night, when up pops a New Moon as thin as a nail-paring, as if we had never stayed no time in the Elvish country. 'Well, I can remember three nights there for certain, and I seem to remember several more, but I would take my oath it was never a whole month. Anyone would think that time did not count in there!' 'And

perhaps that was the way of it,' said Frodo. 'In that land, maybe, we were in a time that has elsewhere long gone by. It was not, I think, until Silverlode bore us back to Anduin that we returned to the time that flows through mortal lands to the Great Sea. And I don't remember any moon, either new or old, in Caras Galadhon: only stars by night and sun by day'. Legolas stirred in his boat. 'Nay, time does not tarry ever,' he said; 'but change and growth is not in all things and places alike. For the Elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by: it is a grief to them. Slow, because they need not count the running years, not for themselves. The passing seasons are but ripples ever repeated in the long long stream. Yet beneath the Sun all things must wear to an end at last'. 'But the wearing is slow in Lo'rien,' said Frodo. 'The power of the Lady is on it. Rich are the hours, though short they seem, in Caras Galadhon, where Galadriel wields the Elven- ring'. 'That should not have been said outside Lo'rien, not even to me,' said Aragorn. 'Speak no more of it! But so it is, Sam: in that land you lost your count. There time flowed swiftly by us, as for the Elves. The old moon passed, and a new moon waxed and waned in the world outside, while we tarried there. And yestereve a new moon came again. Winter is nearly gone. Time flows on to a spring of little hope'. The night passed silently. No voice or call was heard again across the water. The travellers huddled in their boats felt the changing of the weather. The air grew warm and very still under the great moist clouds that had floated up from the South and the distant seas. The rushing of the River over the rocks of the rapids seemed to grow louder and closer. The twigs of the trees above them began to drip. When the day came the mood of the world about them had become soft and sad. Slowly the dawn grew to a pale light, diffused and shadowless. There was mist on the River, and white fog swathed the shore; the far bank could not be seen. 'I can't abide fog,' said Sam; 'but this seems to be a lucky one. Now perhaps we can get away without those cursed goblins seeing us'. 'Perhaps so,' said Aragorn. 'But it will be hard to find the path unless the fog lifts a little later on. And we must find the path, if we are to pass Sarn Gebir and come to the Emyr Muil'. 'I do not see why we should pass the Rapids or follow the River any further,' said Boromir. 'If the Emyr Muil lie before us, then we can abandon these cockle-boats, and strike westward and southward, until we come to the Entwash and cross into my own land'. 'We can, if we are making for Minas Tirith,' said Aragorn, 'but that is not yet agreed. And such a course may be more perilous than it sounds. The vale of Entwash is flat and fenny, and fog is a deadly peril there for those on foot and laden. I would not abandon our boats until we must. The River is at least a path that cannot be missed'. 'But the Enemy holds the eastern bank,' objected Boromir. 'And even if you pass the Gates of Argonath and come unmolested to the Tindrock, what will you do then? Leap down the Falls and land in the marshes?' 'No!' answered Aragorn. 'Say rather that we will bear our boats by the ancient way to Rauros-foot, and there take to the water again. Do you not know, Boromir, or do you choose to forget the North Stair, and the high seat upon Amon Hen, that were made in the days of the great kings? I at least have a mind to stand in that high place again, before I decide my further course. There, maybe, we shall see some sign that will guide us'. Boromir held out long against this choice; but when it became plain that Frodo would follow Aragorn, wherever he went, he gave in. 'It is not the way of the Men of Minas Tirith to desert their friends at need,' he said, 'and you will need my strength, if ever you are to reach the Tindrock. To the tall isle I will go, but no further. There I shall turn to my home, alone if my help has not earned the reward of any companionship'. The day was now growing, and the fog had lifted a little. It was decided that Aragorn and Legolas should at once go forward along the shore, while the others remained by the boats. Aragorn hoped to find some way by

which they could carry both their boats and their baggage to the smoother water beyond the Rapids. 'Boats of the Elves would not sink, maybe,' he said, 'but that does not say that we should come through Sarn Gebir alive. None have ever done so yet. No road was made by the Men of Gondor in this region, for even in their great days their realm did not reach up Anduin beyond the Emyrn Muil; but there is a portage-way somewhere on the western shore, if I can find it. It cannot yet have perished; for light boats used to journey out of Wilderland down to Osgiliath, and still did so until a few years ago, when the Orcs of Mordor began to multiply'. 'Seldom in my life has any boat come out of the North, and the Orcs prowl on the east-shore,' said Boromir. 'If you go forward, peril will grow with every mile, even if you find a path'. 'Peril lies ahead on every southward road,' answered Aragorn. 'Wait for us one day. If we do not return in that time, you will know that evil has indeed befallen us. Then you must take a new leader and follow him as best you can'. It was with a heavy heart that Frodo saw Aragorn and Legolas climb the steep bank and vanish into the mists; but his fears proved groundless. Only two or three hours had passed, and it was barely mid-day, when the shadowy shapes of the explorers appeared again. 'All is well,' said Aragorn, as he clambered down the bank. 'There is a track, and it leads to a good landing that is still serviceable. The distance is not great: the head of the Rapids is but half a mile below us, and they are little more than a mile long. Not far beyond them the stream becomes clear and smooth again, though it runs swiftly. Our hardest task will be to get our boats and baggage to the old portage-way. We have found it, but it lies well back from the water-side here, and runs under the lee of a rock-wall, a furlong or more from the shore. We did not find where the northward landing lies. If it still remains, we must have passed it yesterday night. We might labour far upstream and yet miss it in the fog. I fear we must leave the River now, and make for the portage-way as best we can from here'. 'That would not be easy, even if we were all Men,' said Boromir. 'Yet such as we are we will try it,' said Aragorn. 'Aye, we will,' said Gimli. 'The legs of Men will lag on a rough road, while a Dwarf goes on, be the burden twice his own weight, Master Boromir!' The task proved hard indeed, yet in the end it was done. The goods were taken out of the boats and brought to the top of the bank, where there was a level space. Then the boats were drawn out of the water and carried up. They were far less heavy than any had expected. Of what tree growing in the Elvish country they were made not even Legolas knew; but the wood was tough and yet strangely light. Merry and Pippin alone could carry their boat with ease along the flat. Nonetheless it needed the strength of the two Men to lift and haul them over the ground that the Company now had to cross. It sloped up away from the River, a tumbled waste of grey limestone-boulders, with many hidden holes shrouded with weeds and bushes; there were thickets of brambles, and sheer dells; and here and there boggy pools fed by waters trickling from the terraces further inland. One by one Boromir and Aragorn carried the boats, while the others toiled and scrambled after them with the baggage. At last all was removed and laid on the portage-way. Then with little further hindrance, save from sprawling briars and many fallen stones, they moved forward all together. Fog still hung in veils upon the crumbling rock-wall, and to their left mist shrouded the River: they could hear it rushing and foaming over the sharp shelves and stony teeth of Sarn Gebir, but they could not see it. Twice they made the journey, before all was brought safe to the southern landing. There the portage-way, turning back to the water-side, ran gently down to the shallow edge of a little pool. It seemed to have been scooped in the river-side, not by hand, but by the water swirling down from Sarn Gebir against a low pier of rock that jutted out some way into the stream. Beyond it the shore rose sheer into a grey cliff, and there was no further passage for those on foot. Already the short afternoon was past, and a dim

cloudy dusk was closing in. They sat beside the water listening to the confused rush and roar of the Rapids hidden in the mist; they were tired and sleepy, and their hearts were as gloomy as the dying day. 'Well, here we are, and here we must pass another night,' said Boromir. 'We need sleep, and even if Aragorn had a mind to pass the Gates of Argonath by night, we are all too tired – except, no doubt, our sturdy dwarf'. Gimli made no reply: he was nodding as he sat. 'Let us rest as much as we can now,' said Aragorn. 'Tomorrow we must journey by day again. Unless the weather changes once more and cheats us, we shall have a good chance of slipping through, unseen by any eyes on the eastern shore. But tonight two must watch together in turns: three hours off and one on guard'. Nothing happened that night worse than a brief drizzle of rain an hour before dawn. As soon as it was fully light they started. Already the fog was thinning. They kept as close as they could to the western side, and they could see the dim shapes of the low cliffs rising ever higher, shadowy walls with their feet in the hurrying river. In the mid-morning the clouds drew down lower, and it began to rain heavily. They drew the skin-covers over their boats to prevent them from being flooded, and drifted on; little could be seen before them or about them through the grey falling curtains. The rain, however, did not last long. Slowly the sky above grew lighter, and then suddenly the clouds broke, and their draggled fringes trailed away northward up the River. The fogs and mists were gone. Before the travellers lay a wide ravine, with great rocky sides to which clung, upon shelves and in narrow crevices, a few thrawn trees. The channel grew narrower and the River swifter. Now they were speeding along with little hope of stopping or turning, whatever they might meet ahead. Over them was a lane of pale-blue sky, around them the dark overshadowed River, and before them black, shutting out the sun, the hills of Emyr Muil, in which no opening could be seen. Frodo peering forward saw in the distance two great rocks approaching: like great pinnacles or pillars of stone they seemed. Tall and sheer and ominous they stood upon either side of the stream. A narrow gap appeared between them, and the River swept the boats towards it. 'Behold the Argonath, the Pillars of the Kings!' cried Aragorn. 'We shall pass them soon. Keep the boats in line, and as far apart as you can! Hold the middle of the stream!' As Frodo was borne towards them the great pillars rose like towers to meet him. Giants they seemed to him, vast grey figures silent but threatening. Then he saw that they were indeed shaped and fashioned: the craft and power of old had wrought upon them, and still they preserved through the suns and rains of forgotten years the mighty likenesses in which they had been hewn. Upon great pedestals founded in the deep waters stood two great kings of stone: still with blurred eyes and crannied brows they frowned upon the North. The left hand of each was raised palm outwards in gesture of warning; in each right hand there was an axe; upon each head there was a crumbling helm and crown. Great power and majesty they still wore, the silent wardens of a long-vanished kingdom. Awe and fear fell upon Frodo, and he cowered down, shutting his eyes and not daring to look up as the boat drew near. Even Boromir bowed his head as the boats whirled by, frail and fleeting as little leaves, under the enduring shadow of the sentinels of Númenor. So they passed into the dark chasm of the Gates. Sheer rose the dreadful cliffs to unguessed heights on either side. Far off was the dim sky. The black waters roared and echoed, and a wind screamed over them. Frodo crouching over his knees heard Sam in front muttering and groaning: 'What a place! What a horrible place! Just let me get out of this boat, and I'll never wet my toes in a puddle again, let alone a river!' 'Fear not!' said a strange voice behind him. Frodo turned and saw Strider, and yet not Strider; for the weatherworn Ranger was no longer there. In the stern sat Aragorn son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skilful strokes; his hood was cast back, and his dark hair was blowing in the wind, a

light was in his eyes: a king returning from exile to his own land. 'Fear not!' he said. 'Long have I desired to look upon the likenesses of Isildur and Ana'rion, my sires of old. Under their shadow Elessar, the Elfstone son of Arathorn of the House of Vandalil Isildur's son, heir of Elendil, has naught to dread!' Then the light of his eyes faded, and he spoke to himself: 'Would that Gandalf were here! How my heart yearns for Minas Anor and the walls of my own city! But whither now shall I go?' The chasm was long and dark, and filled with the noise of wind and rushing water and echoing stone. It bent somewhat towards the west so that at first all was dark ahead; but soon Frodo saw a tall gap of light before him, ever growing. Swiftly it drew near, and suddenly the boats shot through, out into a wide clear light. The sun, already long fallen from the noon, was shining in a windy sky. The pent waters spread out into a long oval lake, pale Nen Hithoel, fenced by steep grey hills whose sides were clad with trees, but their heads were bare, cold-gleaming in the sunlight. At the far southern end rose three peaks. The midmost stood somewhat forward from the others and sundered from them, an island in the waters, about which the flowing River flung pale shimmering arms. Distant but deep there came up on the wind a roaring sound like the roll of thunder heard far away. 'Behold Tol Brandir!' said Aragorn, pointing south to the tall peak. 'Upon the left stands Amon Lhaw, and upon the right is Amon Hen, the Hills of Hearing and of Sight. In the days of the great kings there were high seats upon them, and watch was kept there. But it is said that no foot of man or beast has ever been set upon Tol Brandir. Ere the shade of night falls we shall come to them. I hear the endless voice of Rauros calling'. The Company rested now for a while, drifting south on the current that flowed through the middle of the lake. They ate some food, and then they took to their paddles and hastened on their way. The sides of the westward hills fell into shadow, and the Sun grew round and red. Here and there a misty star peered out. The three peaks loomed before them, darkling in the twilight. Rauros was roaring with a great voice. Already night was laid on the flowing waters when the travellers came at last under the shadow of the hills. The tenth day of their journey was over. Wilderland was behind them. They could go no further without choice between the east-way and the west. The last stage of the Quest was before them. Aragorn led them to the right arm of the River. Here upon its western side under the shadow of Tol Brandir a green lawn ran down to the water from the feet of Amon Hen. Behind it rose the first gentle slopes of the hill clad with trees, and trees marched away westward along the curving shores of the lake. A little spring fell tumbling down and fed the grass. 'Here we will rest tonight,' said Aragorn. 'This is the lawn of Parth Galen: a fair place in the summer days of old. Let us hope that no evil has yet come here'. They drew up their boats on the green banks, and beside them they made their camp. They set a watch, but had no sight nor sound of their enemies. If Gollum had contrived to follow them, he remained unseen and unheard. Nonetheless as the night wore on Aragorn grew uneasy, tossing often in his sleep and waking. In the small hours he got up and came to Frodo, whose turn it was to watch. 'Why are you waking?' asked Frodo. 'It is not your watch'. 'I do not know,' answered Aragorn; 'but a shadow and a threat has been growing in my sleep. It would be well to draw your sword'. 'Why?' said Frodo. 'Are enemies at hand?' 'Let us see what Sting may show,' answered Aragorn. Frodo then drew the elf-blade from its sheath. To his dismay the edges gleamed dimly in the night. 'Orcs!' he said. 'Not very near, and yet too near, it seems'. 'I feared as much,' said Aragorn. 'But maybe they are not on this side of the River. The light of Sting is faint, and it may point to no more than spies of Mordor roaming on the slopes of Amon Lhaw. I have never heard before of Orcs upon Amon Hen. Yet who knows what may happen in these evil days, now that Minas Tirith no longer holds secure the passages of Anduin. We must go warily tomorrow'. The day

came like fire and smoke. Low in the East there were black bars of cloud like the fumes of a great burning. The rising sun lit them from beneath with flames of murky red; but soon it climbed above them into a clear sky. The summit of Tol Brandir was tipped with gold. Frodo looked out eastward and gazed at the tall island. Its sides sprang sheer out of the running water. High up above the tall cliffs were steep slopes upon which trees climbed, mounting one head above another; and above them again were grey faces of inaccessible rock, crowned by a great spire of stone. Many birds were circling about it, but no sign of other living things could be seen. When they had eaten, Aragorn called the Company together. 'The day has come at last,' he said: 'the day of choice which we have long delayed. What shall now become of our Company that has travelled so far in fellowship? Shall we turn west with Boromir and go to the wars of Gondor; or turn east to the Fear and Shadow; or shall we break our fellowship and go this way and that as each may choose? Whatever we do must be done soon. We cannot long halt here. The enemy is on the eastern shore, we know; but I fear that the Orcs may already be on this side of the water'. There was a long silence in which no one spoke or moved. 'Well, Frodo,' said Aragorn at last. 'I fear that the burden is laid upon you. You are the Bearer appointed by the Council. Your own way you alone can choose. In this matter I cannot advise you. I am not Gandalf, and though I have tried to bear his part, I do not know what design or hope he had for this hour, if indeed he had any. Most likely it seems that if he were here now the choice would still wait on you. Such is your fate'. Frodo did not answer at once. Then he spoke slowly. 'I know that haste is needed, yet I cannot choose. The burden is heavy. Give me an hour longer, and I will speak. Let me be alone!'

Aragorn looked at him with kindly pity. 'Very well, Frodo son of Drogo,' he said. 'You shall have an hour, and you shall be alone. We will stay here for a while. But do not stray far or out of call'. Frodo sat for a moment with his head bowed. Sam, who had been watching his master with great concern, shook his head and muttered: 'Plain as a pikestaff it is, but it's no good Sam Gamgee putting in his spoke just now'. Presently Frodo got up and walked away; and Sam saw that while the others restrained themselves and did not stare at him, the eyes of Boromir followed Frodo intently, until he passed out of sight in the trees at the foot of Amon Hen. Wandering aimlessly at first in the wood, Frodo found that his feet were leading him up towards the slopes of the hill. He came to a path, the dwindling ruins of a road of long ago. In steep places stairs of stone had been hewn, but now they were cracked and worn, and split by the roots of trees. For some while he climbed, not caring which way he went, until he came to a grassy place. Rowan-trees grew about it, and in the midst was a wide flat stone. The little upland lawn was open upon the East and was filled now with the early sunlight. Frodo halted and looked out over the River, far below him, to Tol Brandir and the birds wheeling in the great gulf of air between him and the untrodden isle. The voice of Rauros was a mighty roaring mingled with a deep throbbing boom. He sat down upon the stone and cupped his chin in his hands, staring eastwards but seeing little with his eyes. All that had happened since Bilbo left the Shire was passing through his mind, and he recalled and pondered everything that he could remember of Gandalf's words. Time went on, and still he was no nearer a choice. Suddenly he awoke from his thoughts: a strange feeling came to him that something was behind him, that unfriendly eyes were upon him. He sprang up and turned; but all that he saw to his surprise was Boromir, and his face was smiling and kind. 'I was afraid for you, Frodo,' he said, coming forward. 'If Aragorn is right and Orcs are near, then none of us should wander alone, and you least of all: so much depends on you. And my heart too is heavy. May I stay now and talk for a while, since I have found you? It would comfort me. Where there are so many, all speech becomes a debate without end. But two together may perhaps find wisdom'.

‘You are kind,’ answered Frodo. ‘But I do not think that any speech will help me. For I know what I should do, but I am afraid of doing it, Boromir: afraid’. Boromir stood silent. Rauros roared endlessly on. The wind murmured in the branches of the trees. Frodo shivered. Suddenly Boromir came and sat beside him. ‘Are you sure that you do not suffer needlessly?’ he said. ‘I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?’ ‘I think I know already what counsel you would give, Boromir,’ said Frodo. ‘And it would seem like wisdom but for the warning of my heart’. ‘Warning? Warning against what?’ said Boromir sharply. ‘Against delay. Against the way that seems easier. Against refusal of the burden that is laid on me. Against – well, if it must be said, against trust in the strength and truth of Men’. ‘Yet that strength has long protected you far away in your little country, though you knew it not’. ‘I do not doubt the valour of your people. But the world is changing. The walls of Minas Tirith may be strong, but they are not strong enough. If they fail, what then?’ ‘We shall fall in battle valiantly. Yet there is still hope that they will not fail’. ‘No hope while the Ring lasts,’ said Frodo. ‘Ah! The Ring!’ said Boromir, his eyes lighting. ‘The Ring! Is it not a strange fate that we should suffer so much fear and doubt for so small a thing? So small a thing! And I have seen it only for an instant in the house of Elrond. Could I not have a sight of it again?’ Frodo looked up. His heart went suddenly cold. He caught the strange gleam in Boromir’s eyes, yet his face was still kind and friendly. ‘It is best that it should lie hidden,’ he answered. ‘As you wish. I care not,’ said Boromir. ‘Yet may I not even speak of it? For you seem ever to think only of its power in the hands of the Enemy: of its evil uses not of its good. The world is changing, you say. Minas Tirith will fall, if the Ring lasts. But why? Certainly, if the Ring were with the Enemy. But why, if it were with us?’ ‘Were you not at the Council?’ answered Frodo. ‘Because we cannot use it, and what is done with it turns to evil’. Boromir got up and walked about impatiently. ‘So you go on,’ he cried. ‘Gandalf, Elrond – all these folk have taught you to say so. For themselves they may be right. These elves and half-elves and wizards, they would come to grief perhaps. Yet often I doubt if they are wise and not merely timid. But each to his own kind. True-hearted Men, they will not be corrupted. We of Minas Tirith have been staunch through long years of trial. We do not desire the power of wizard- lords, only strength to defend ourselves, strength in a just cause. And behold! in our need chance brings to light the Ring of Power. It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it, to use the power of the Enemy against him. The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory. What could not a warrior do in this hour, a great leader? What could not Aragorn do? Or if he refuses, why not Boromir? The Ring would give me power of Command. How I would drive the hosts of Mordor, and all men would flock to my banner!’ Boromir strode up and down, speaking ever more loudly. Almost he seemed to have forgotten Frodo, while his talk dwelt on walls and weapons, and the mustering of men; and he drew plans for great alliances and glorious victories to be; and he cast down Mordor, and became himself a mighty king, benevolent and wise. Suddenly he stopped and waved his arms. ‘And they tell us to throw it away!’ he cried. ‘I do not say destroy it. That might be well, if reason could show any hope of doing so. It does not. The only plan that is proposed to us is that a halfling should walk blindly into Mordor and offer the Enemy every chance of recapturing it for himself. Folly!’ ‘Surely you see it, my friend?’ he said, turning now suddenly to Frodo again. ‘You say that you are afraid. If it is so, the boldest should pardon you. But is it not really your good sense that revolts?’ ‘No, I am afraid,’ said Frodo. ‘Simply afraid. But I am glad to have heard you speak so fully. My mind is clearer now’. ‘Then you will come to Minas Tirith?’ cried Boromir. His eyes were shining and his face eager. ‘You misunderstand me,’ said Frodo. ‘But you will

come, at least for a while?’ Boromir persisted. ‘My city is not far now; and it is little further from there to Mordor than from here. We have been long in the wilderness, and you need news of what the Enemy is doing before you make a move. Come with me, Frodo,’ he said. ‘You need rest before your venture, if go you must’. He laid his hand on the hobbit’s shoulder in friendly fashion; but Frodo felt the hand trembling with suppressed excitement. He stepped quickly away, and eyed with alarm the tall Man, nearly twice his height and many times his match in strength. ‘Why are you so unfriendly?’ said Boromir. ‘I am a true man, neither thief nor tracker. I need your Ring: that you know now; but I give you my word that I do not desire to keep it. Will you not at least let me make trial of my plan? Lend me the Ring!’ ‘No! no!’ cried Frodo. ‘The Council laid it upon me to bear it’. ‘It is by our own folly that the Enemy will defeat us,’ cried Boromir. ‘How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause. If any mortals have claim to the Ring, it is the men of Nu´menor, and not Halflings. It is not yours save by unhappy chance. It might have been mine. It should be mine. Give it to me!’ Frodo did not answer, but moved away till the great flat stone stood between them. ‘Come, come, my friend!’ said Boromir in a softer voice. ‘Why not get rid of it? Why not be free of your doubt and fear? You can lay the blame on me, if you will. You can say that I was too strong and took it by force. For I am too strong for you, halfling,’ he cried; and suddenly he sprang over the stone and leaped at Frodo. His fair and pleasant face was hideously changed; a raging fire was in his eyes. Frodo dodged aside and again put the stone between them. There was only one thing he could do: trembling he pulled out the Ring upon its chain and quickly slipped it on his finger, even as Boromir sprang at him again. The Man gasped, stared for a moment amazed, and then ran wildly about, seeking here and there among the rocks and trees. ‘Miserable trickster!’ he shouted. ‘Let me get my hands on you! Now I see your mind. You will take the Ring to Sauron and sell us all. You have only waited your chance to leave us in the lurch. Curse you and all halflings to death and darkness!’ Then, catching his foot on a stone, he fell sprawling and lay upon his face. For a while he was as still as if his own curse had struck him down; then suddenly he wept. He rose and passed his hand over his eyes, dashing away the tears. ‘What have I said?’ he cried. ‘What have I done? Frodo, Frodo!’ he called. ‘Come back! A madness took me, but it has passed. Come back!’ There was no answer. Frodo did not even hear his cries. He was already far away, leaping blindly up the path to the hill-top. Terror and grief shook him, seeing in his thought the mad fierce face of Boromir, and his burning eyes. Soon he came out alone on the summit of Amon Hen, and halted, gasping for breath. He saw as through a mist a wide flat circle, paved with mighty flags, and surrounded with a crumbling battlement; and in the middle, set upon four carven pillars, was a high seat, reached by a stair of many steps. Up he went and sat upon the ancient chair, feeling like a lost child that had clambered upon the throne of mountain-kings. At first he could see little. He seemed to be in a world of mist in which there were only shadows: the Ring was upon him. Then here and there the mist gave way and he saw many visions: small and clear as if they were under his eyes upon a table, and yet remote. There was no sound, only bright living images. The world seemed to have shrunk and fallen silent. He was sitting upon the Seat of Seeing, on Amon Hen, the Hill of the Eye of the Men of Nu´menor. Eastward he looked into wide uncharted lands, nameless plains, and forests unexplored. Northward he looked, and the Great River lay like a ribbon beneath him, and the Misty Mountains stood small and hard as broken teeth. Westward he looked and saw the broad pastures of Rohan; and Orthanc, the pinnacle of Isengard, like a black spike. Southward he looked, and below his very feet the Great River curled like a toppling wave and plunged over the falls of Rauros into a foaming pit; a glimmering

rainbow played upon the fume. And Ethir Anduin he saw, the mighty delta of the River, and myriads of sea-birds whirling like a white dust in the sun, and beneath them a green and silver sea, rippling in endless lines. But everywhere he looked he saw the signs of war. The Misty Mountains were crawling like anthills: orcs were issuing out of a thousand holes. Under the boughs of Mirkwood there was deadly strife of Elves and Men and fell beasts. The land of the Beornings was aflame; a cloud was over Moria; smoke rose on the borders of Lo´rien. Horsemen were galloping on the grass of Rohan; wolves poured from Isengard. From the havens of Harad ships of war put out to sea; and out of the East Men were moving endlessly: swordsmen, spearmen, bowmen upon horses, chariots of chieftains and laden wains. All the power of the Dark Lord was in motion. Then turning south again he beheld Minas Tirith. Far away it seemed, and beautiful: white-walled, many-towered, proud and fair upon its mountain-seat; its battlements glittered with steel, and its turrets were bright with many banners. Hope leaped in his heart. But against Minas Tirith was set another fortress, greater and more strong. Thither, eastward, unwilling his eye was drawn. It passed the ruined bridges of Osgiliath, the grinning gates of Minas Morgul, and the haunted Mountains, and it looked upon Gorgoroth, the valley of terror in the Land of Mordor. Dark- ness lay there under the Sun. Fire glowed amid the smoke. Mount Doom was burning, and a great reek rising. Then at last his gaze was held: wall upon wall, battlement upon battlement, black, immeasurably strong, mountain of iron, gate of steel, tower of adamant, he saw it: Barad-du`r, Fortress of Sauron. All hope left him. And suddenly he felt the Eye. There was an eye in the Dark Tower that did not sleep. He knew that it had become aware of his gaze. A fierce eager will was there. It leaped towards him; almost like a finger he felt it, searching for him. Very soon it would nail him down, know just exactly where he was. Amon Lhaw it touched. It glanced upon Tol Brandir – he threw himself from the seat, crouching, covering his head with his grey hood. He heard himself crying out: Never, never! Or was it: Verily I come, I come to you? He could not tell. Then as a flash from some other point of power there came to his mind another thought: Take it off! Take it off! Fool, take it off! Take off the Ring! The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tor- mented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again, Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the Ring off his finger. He was kneeling in clear sunlight before the high seat. A black shadow seemed to pass like an arm above him; it missed Amon Hen and groped out west, and faded. Then all the sky was clean and blue and birds sang in every tree. Frodo rose to his feet. A great weariness was on him, but his will was firm and his heart lighter. He spoke aloud to himself. ‘I will do now what I must,’ he said. ‘This at least is plain: the evil of the Ring is already at work even in the Company, and the Ring must leave them before it does more harm. I will go alone. Some I cannot trust, and those I can trust are too dear to me: poor old Sam, and Merry and Pippin. Strider, too: his heart yearns for Minas Tirith, and he will be needed there, now Boromir has fallen into evil. I will go alone. At once’. He went quickly down the path and came back to the lawn where Boromir had found him. Then he halted, listening. He thought he could hear cries and calls from the woods near the shore below. ‘They’ll be hunting for me,’ he said. ‘I wonder how long I have been away. Hours, I should think’. He hesitated. ‘What can I do?’ he muttered. ‘I must go now or I shall never go. I shan’t get a chance again. I hate leaving them, and like this without any explanation. But surely they will understand. Sam will. And what else can I do?’ Slowly he drew out the Ring and put it on once more. He vanished and passed down the hill, less than a rustle of the wind. The others remained long by the river-side. For some time they had been silent, moving restlessly about; but now they

were sitting in a circle, and they were talking. Every now and again they made efforts to speak of other things, of their long road and many adventures; they questioned Aragorn concerning the realm of Gondor and its ancient history, and the remnants of its great works that could still be seen in this strange border-land of the Eryn Mui: the stone kings and the seats of Lhaw and Hen, and the great Stair beside the falls of Rauros. But always their thoughts and words strayed back to Frodo and the Ring. What would Frodo choose to do? Why was he hesitating? 'He is debating which course is the most desperate, I think,' said Aragorn. 'And well he may. It is now more hopeless than ever for the Company to go east, since we have been tracked by Gollum, and must fear that the secret of our journey is already betrayed. But Minas Tirith is no nearer to the Fire and the destruction of the Burden. 'We may remain there for a while and make a brave stand; but the Lord Denethor and all his men cannot hope to do what even Elrond said was beyond his power: either to keep the Burden secret, or to hold off the full might of the Enemy when he comes to take it. Which way would any of us choose in Frodo's place? I do not know. Now indeed we miss Gandalf most'. 'Grievous is our loss,' said Legolas. 'Yet we must needs make up our minds without his aid. Why cannot we decide, and so help Frodo? Let us call him back and then vote! I should vote for Minas Tirith'. 'And so should I,' said Gimli. 'We, of course, were only sent to help the Bearer along the road, to go no further than we wished; and none of us is under any oath or command to seek Mount Doom. Hard was my parting from Lothlórien. Yet I have come so far, and I say this: now we have reached the last choice, it is clear to me that I cannot leave Frodo. I would choose Minas Tirith, but if he does not, then I follow him'. 'And I too will go with him,' said Legolas. 'It would be faithless now to say farewell'. 'It would indeed be a betrayal, if we all left him,' said Aragorn. 'But if he goes east, then all need not go with him; nor do I think that all should. That venture is desperate: as much so for eight as for three or two, or one alone. If you would let me choose, then I should appoint three companions: Sam, who could not bear it otherwise; and Gimli; and myself. Boromir will return to his own city, where his father and his people need him; and with him the others should go, or at least Meriadoc and Peregrin, if Legolas is not willing to leave us'. 'That won't do at all!' cried Merry. 'We can't leave Frodo! Pippin and I always intended to go wherever he went, and we still do. But we did not realize what that would mean. It seemed different so far away, in the Shire or in Rivendell. It would be mad and cruel to let Frodo go to Mordor. Why can't we stop him?' 'We must stop him,' said Pippin. 'And that is what he is worrying about, I am sure. He knows we shan't agree to his going east. And he doesn't like to ask anyone to go with him, poor old fellow. Imagine it: going off to Mordor alone!' Pippin shuddered. 'But the dear silly old hobbit, he ought to know that he hasn't got to ask. He ought to know that if we can't stop him, we shan't leave him'. 'Begging your pardon,' said Sam. 'I don't think you understand my master at all. He isn't hesitating about which way to go. Of course not! What's the good of Minas Tirith anyway? To him, I mean, begging your pardon, Master Boromir,' he added, and turned. It was then that they discovered that Boromir, who at first had been sitting silent on the outside of the circle, was no longer there. 'Now where's he got to?' cried Sam, looking worried. 'He's been a bit queer lately, to my mind. But anyway he's not in this business. He's off to his home, as he always said; and no blame to him. But Mr Frodo, he knows he's got to find the Cracks of Doom, if he can. But he's afraid. Now it's come to the point, he's just plain terrified. That's what his trouble is. Of course he's had a bit of schooling, so to speak – we all have – since we left home, or he'd be so terrified he'd just fling the Ring in the River and bolt. But he's still too frightened to start. And he isn't worrying about us either: whether we'll go along with him or no. He knows we mean to. That's another

thing that's bothering him. If he screws himself up to go, he'll want to go alone. Mark my words! We're going to have trouble when he comes back. For he'll screw himself up all right, as sure as his name's Baggins'. 'I believe you speak more wisely than any of us, Sam,' said Aragorn. 'And what shall we do, if you prove right?' 'Stop him! Don't let him go!' cried Pippin. 'I wonder?' said Aragorn. 'He is the Bearer, and the fate of the Burden is on him. I do not think that it is our part to drive him one way or the other. Nor do I think that we should succeed, if we tried. There are other powers at work far stronger'. 'Well, I wish Frodo would "screw himself up" and come back, and let us get it over,' said Pippin. 'This waiting is horrible! Surely the time is up?' 'Yes,' said Aragorn. 'The hour is long passed. The morning is wearing away. We must call for him'. At that moment Boromir reappeared. He came out from the trees and walked towards them without speaking. His face looked grim and sad. He paused as if counting those that were present, and then sat down aloof, with his eyes on the ground. 'Where have you been, Boromir?' asked Aragorn. 'Have you seen Frodo?' Boromir hesitated for a second. 'Yes, and no,' he answered slowly. 'Yes: I found him some way up the hill, and I spoke to him. I urged him to come to Minas Tirith and not to go east. I grew angry and he left me. He vanished. I have never seen such a thing happen before, though I have heard of it in tales. He must have put the Ring on. I could not find him again. I thought he would return to you'. 'Is that all that you have to say?' said Aragorn, looking hard and not too kindly at Boromir. 'Yes,' he answered. 'I will say no more yet'. 'This is bad!' cried Sam, jumping up. 'I don't know what this Man has been up to. Why should Mr Frodo put the thing on? He didn't ought to have; and if he has, goodness knows what may have happened!' 'But he wouldn't keep it on,' said Merry. 'Not when he had escaped the unwelcome visitor, like Bilbo used to'. 'But where did he go? Where is he?' cried Pippin. 'He's been away ages now'. 'How long is it since you saw Frodo last, Boromir?' asked Aragorn. 'Half an hour, maybe,' he answered. 'Or it might be an hour. I have wandered for some time since. I do not know! I do not know!' He put his head in his hands, and sat as if bowed with grief. 'An hour since he vanished!' shouted Sam. 'We must try and find him at once. Come on!' 'Wait a moment!' cried Aragorn. 'We must divide up into pairs, and arrange – here, hold on! Wait!' It was no good. They took no notice of him. Sam had dashed off first. Merry and Pippin had followed, and were already disappearing westward into the trees by the shore, shouting: Frodo! Frodo! in their clear, high, hobbit-voices. Legolas and Gimli were running. A sudden panic or madness seemed to have fallen on the Company. 'We shall all be scattered and lost,' groaned Aragorn. 'Boro- mir! I do not know what part you have played in this mischief, but help now! Go after those two young hobbits, and guard them at the least, even if you cannot find Frodo. Come back to this spot, if you find him, or any traces of him. I shall return soon'. Aragorn sprang swiftly away and went in pursuit of Sam. Just as he reached the little lawn among the rowans he overtook him, toiling uphill, panting and calling, Frodo! 'Come with me, Sam!' he said. 'None of us should be alone. There is mischief about. I feel it. I am going to the top, to the Seat of Amon Hen, to see what may be seen. And look! It is as my heart guessed, Frodo went this way. Follow me, and keep your eyes open!' He sped up the path. Sam did his best, but he could not keep up with Strider the Ranger, and soon fell behind. He had not gone far before Aragorn was out of sight ahead. Sam stopped and puffed. Suddenly he clapped his hand to his head. 'Whoa, Sam Gamgee!' he said aloud. 'Your legs are too short, so use your head! Let me see now! Boromir isn't lying, that's not his way; but he hasn't told us everything. Some- thing scared Mr Frodo badly. He screwed himself up to the point, sudden. He made up his mind at last – to go. Where to? Off East. Not without Sam? Yes, without even his Sam. That's hard, cruel hard'. Sam

passed his hand over his eyes, brushing away the tears. 'Steady, Gamgee!' he said. 'Think, if you can! He can't fly across rivers, and he can't jump waterfalls. He's got no gear. So he's got to get back to the boats. Back to the boats! Back to the boats, Sam, like lightning!' Sam turned and bolted back down the path. He fell and cut his knees. Up he got and ran on. He came to the edge of the lawn of Parth Galen by the shore, where the boats were drawn up out of the water. No one was there. There seemed to be cries in the woods behind, but he did not heed them. He stood gazing for a moment, stock-still, gaping. A boat was sliding down the bank all by itself. With a shout Sam raced across the grass. The boat slipped into the water. 'Coming, Mr Frodo! Coming!' called Sam, and flung himself from the bank, clutching at the departing boat. He missed it by a yard. With a cry and a splash he fell face downward into deep swift water. Gurgling he went under, and the River closed over his curly head. An exclamation of dismay came from the empty boat. A paddle swirled and the boat put about. Frodo was just in time to grasp Sam by the hair as he came up, bubbling and struggling. Fear was staring in his round brown eyes. 'Up you come, Sam my lad!' said Frodo. 'Now take my hand!' 'Save me, Mr Frodo!' gasped Sam. 'I'm drowned. I can't see your hand'. 'Here it is. Don't pinch, lad! I won't let you go. Tread water and don't flounder, or you'll upset the boat. There now, get hold of the side, and let me use the paddle!' With a few strokes Frodo brought the boat back to the bank, and Sam was able to scramble out, wet as a water-rat. Frodo took off the Ring and stepped ashore again. 'Of all the confounded nuisances you are the worst, Sam!' he said. 'Oh, Mr Frodo, that's hard!' said Sam shivering. 'That's hard, trying to go without me and all. If I hadn't guessed right, where would you be now?' 'Safely on my way'. 'Safely!' said Sam. 'All alone and without me to help you? I couldn't have borne it, it'd have been the death of me'. 'It would be the death of you to come with me, Sam,' said Frodo, 'and I could not have borne that'. 'Not as certain as being left behind,' said Sam. 'But I am going to Mordor'. 'I know that well enough, Mr Frodo. Of course you are. And I'm coming with you'. 'Now, Sam,' said Frodo, 'don't hinder me! The others will be coming back at any minute. If they catch me here, I shall have to argue and explain, and I shall never have the heart or the chance to get off. But I must go at once. It's the only way'. 'Of course it is,' answered Sam. 'But not alone. I'm coming too, or neither of us isn't going. I'll knock holes in all the boats first'. Frodo actually laughed. A sudden warmth and gladness touched his heart. 'Leave one!' he said. 'We'll need it. But you can't come like this without your gear or food or anything'. 'Just hold on a moment, and I'll get my stuff!' cried Sam eagerly. 'It's all ready. I thought we should be off today'. He rushed to the camping place, fished out his pack from the pile where Frodo had laid it when he emptied the boat of his companions' goods, grabbed a spare blanket, and some extra packages of food, and ran back. 'So all my plan is spoilt!' said Frodo. 'It is no good trying to escape you. But I'm glad, Sam. I cannot tell you how glad. Come along! It is plain that we were meant to go together. We will go, and may the others find a safe road! Strider will look after them. I don't suppose we shall see them again'. 'Yet we may, Mr Frodo. We may,' said Sam. So Frodo and Sam set off on the last stage of the Quest together. Frodo paddled away from the shore, and the River bore them swiftly away, down the western arm, and past the frowning cliffs of Tol Brandir. The roar of the great falls drew nearer. Even with such help as Sam could give, it was hard work to pass across the current at the southward end of the island and drive the boat eastward towards the far shore. At length they came to land again upon the southern slopes of Amon Lhaw. There they found a shelving shore, and they drew the boat out, high above the water, and hid it as well as they could behind a great boulder. Then shouldering their

burdens, they set off, seeking a path that would bring them over the grey hills of the Emyn Muil, and down into the Land of Shadow.

TOPICS:

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frodo

gandalf

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said

TOP TOPICS Chapter II: The Shadow of the Past:

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TOP TOPICS Chapter III: Three is Company:

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frodo

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long
gimli
TOP TOPICS Chapter IV: A Journey in the Dark:
wizard
great
frodo

light

sam

TOP TOPICS Chapter V: The Bridge of Khazad-du'm:

aragorn

great

time

dark

bridge

TOP TOPICS Chapter VI: Lothlo'rien:

orcs

eyes

gimli

aragorn

said

TOP TOPICS Chapter VII: The Mirror of Galadriel:

grey

fell

elves

gandalf

things

TOP TOPICS Chapter VIII: Farewell to Lo'rien:

lo

rien

elves

galadriel

said

TOP TOPICS Chapter IX: The Great River:

bank

eyes

sam

said

frodo

TOP TOPICS Chapter X: The Breaking of the Fellowship:

great

long

sam

frodo

away