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Extracts taken from
The Hobbit

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Very soon a grey patch came in the darkness ahead. He heard the creak of the water-gate being hauled up, and he found that he was in the midst of a bobbing and bumping mass of casks and tubs all pressing together to pass under the arch and get out into the open stream. He had as much as he could do to prevent himself from being hustled and battered to bits; but at last the jostling crowd began to break up and swing off, one by one, under the stony arch and away. Then he saw that it would have been no good even if he had managed to get astride his barrel, for there was no room to spare, not even for a hobbit, between its top and the suddenly stooping roof where the gate was.

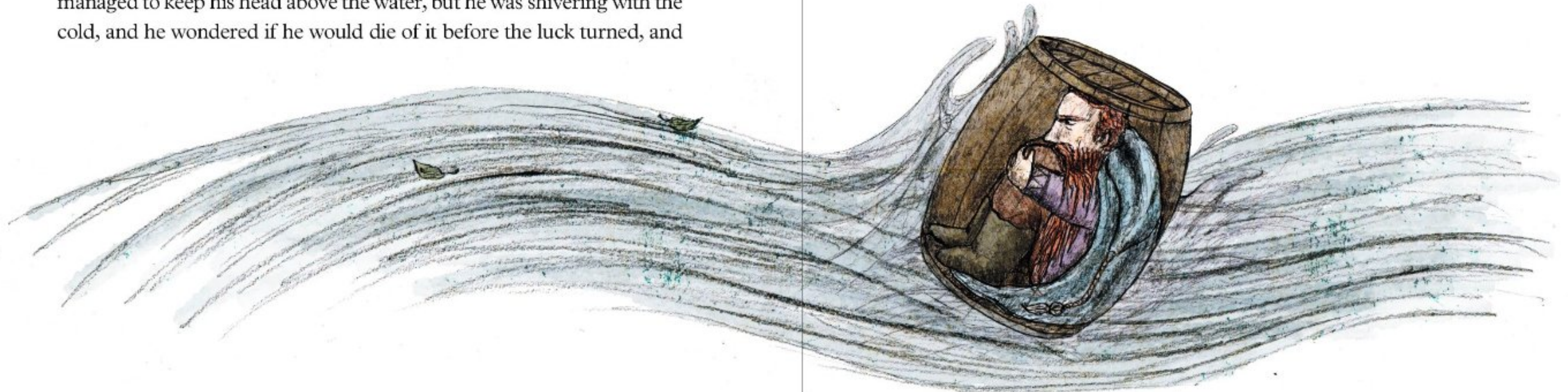
Out they went under the overhanging branches of the trees on either bank. Bilbo wondered what the dwarves were feeling and whether a lot of water was getting into their tubs. Some of those that bobbed along by him in the gloom seemed pretty low in the water, and he guessed that these had dwarves inside.

"I do hope I put the lids on tight enough!" he thought, but before long he was worrying too much about himself to remember the dwarves. He managed to keep his head above the water, but he was shivering with the cold, and he wondered if he would die of it before the luck turned, and

how much longer he would be able to hang on, and whether he should risk the chance of letting go and trying to swim to the bank.

The luck turned all right before long: the eddying current carried several barrels close ashore at one point and there for a while they stuck against some hidden root. Then Bilbo took the opportunity of scrambling up the side of his barrel while it was held steady against another. Up he crawled like a drowned rat, and lay on the top spread out to keep the balance as best he could. The breeze was cold but better than the water, and he hoped he would not suddenly roll off again when they started off once more.

Before long the barrels broke free again and turned and twisted off down the stream, and out into the main current. Then he found it quite as difficult to stick on as he had feared; but he managed it somehow, though it was miserably uncomfortable. Luckily he was very light, and the barrel was a good big one and being rather leaky had now shipped a small amount of water. All the same it was like trying to ride, without bridle or stirrups, a round-bellied pony that was always thinking of rolling on the grass.





who were scrambling up now as far as they ever dared to go.

Poor little Bilbo was very nearly left behind again! He just managed to catch hold of Dori's legs, as Dori was borne off last of all; and up they went together above the tumult and the burning, Bilbo swinging in the air with his arms nearly breaking.

Now far below the goblins and the wolves were scattering far and wide in the woods. A few eagles were still circling and sweeping above the battle-ground. The flames about the trees sprang suddenly up above the highest branches. They went up in crackling fire. There was a sudden flurry of sparks and smoke. Bilbo had escaped only just in time!

Soon the light of the burning was faint below, a red twinkle on the black floor; and they were high up in the sky, rising all the time in strong sweeping circles. Bilbo never forgot that flight, clinging onto Dori's ankles. He moaned "my arms, my arms!"; but Dori groaned "my poor legs, my poor legs!"

At the best of times heights made Bilbo giddy. He used to turn

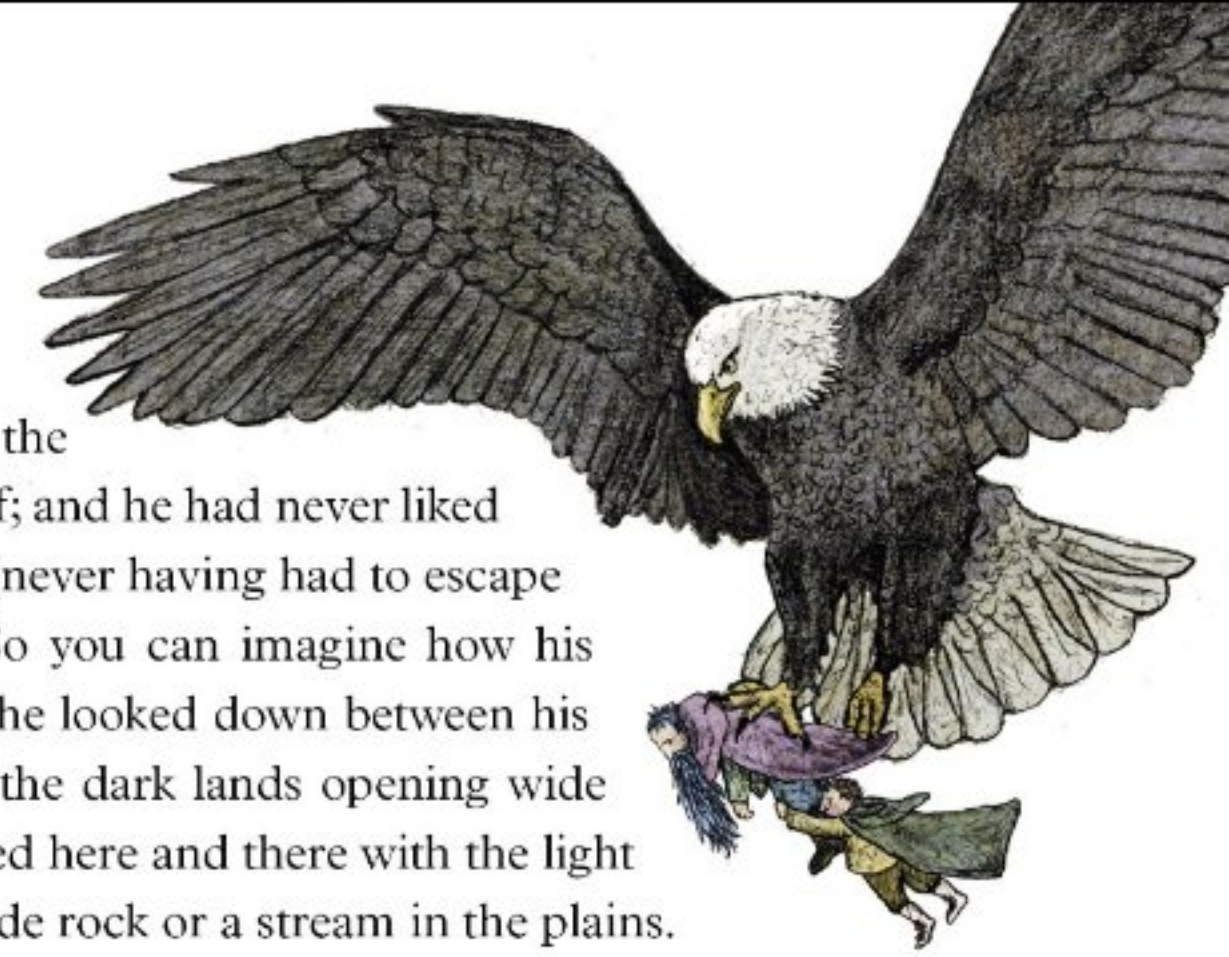
queer if he looked over the edge of quite a little cliff; and he had never liked ladders, let alone trees (never having had to escape from wolves before). So you can imagine how his head swam now, when he looked down between his dangling toes and saw the dark lands opening wide underneath him, touched here and there with the light of the moon on a hill-side rock or a stream in the plains.

The pale peaks of the mountains were coming nearer, moonlit spikes of rock sticking out of black shadows. Summer or not, it seemed very cold. He shut his eyes and wondered if he could hold on any longer. Then he imagined what would happen if he did not. He felt sick.

The flight ended only just in time for him, just before his arms gave way. He loosed Dori's ankles with a gasp and fell onto the rough platform of an eagle's eyrie. There he lay without speaking, and his thoughts were a mixture of surprise at being saved from the fire, and fear lest he fall off that narrow place into the deep shadows on either side. He was feeling very queer indeed in his head by this time after the dreadful adventures of the last three days with next to nothing to eat, and he found himself saying aloud: "Now I know what a piece of bacon feels like when it is suddenly picked out of the pan on a fork and put back on the shelf!"

"No you don't!" he heard Dori answering, "because the bacon knows that it will get back in the pan sooner or later; and it is to be hoped we shan't. Also eagles aren't forks!"

"O no! Not a bit like storks—forks, I mean," said Bilbo sitting up and looking anxiously at the eagle who was perched close by. He



beating and a more fevered shaking was in his legs than when he was going down, but still he clutched the cup, and his chief thought was: "I've done it! This will show them. 'More like a grocer than a burglar' indeed! Well, we'll hear no more of that."

Nor did he. Balin was overjoyed to see the hobbit again, and as delighted as he was surprised. He picked Bilbo up and carried him out into the open air. It was midnight and clouds had covered the stars, but Bilbo lay with his eyes shut, gasping and taking pleasure in the feel of the fresh air again, and hardly noticing the excitement of the dwarves, or how they praised him and patted him on the back and put themselves and all their families for generations to come at his service.



The dwarves were still passing the cup from hand to hand and talking delightedly of the recovery of their treasure, when suddenly a vast rumbling woke in the mountain underneath as if it was an old volcano that had made up its mind to start eruptions once again. The door behind them was pulled nearly to, and blocked from closing with a stone, but up the long tunnel came the dreadful echoes, from far down in the depths, of a bellowing and a trampling that made the ground beneath them tremble.

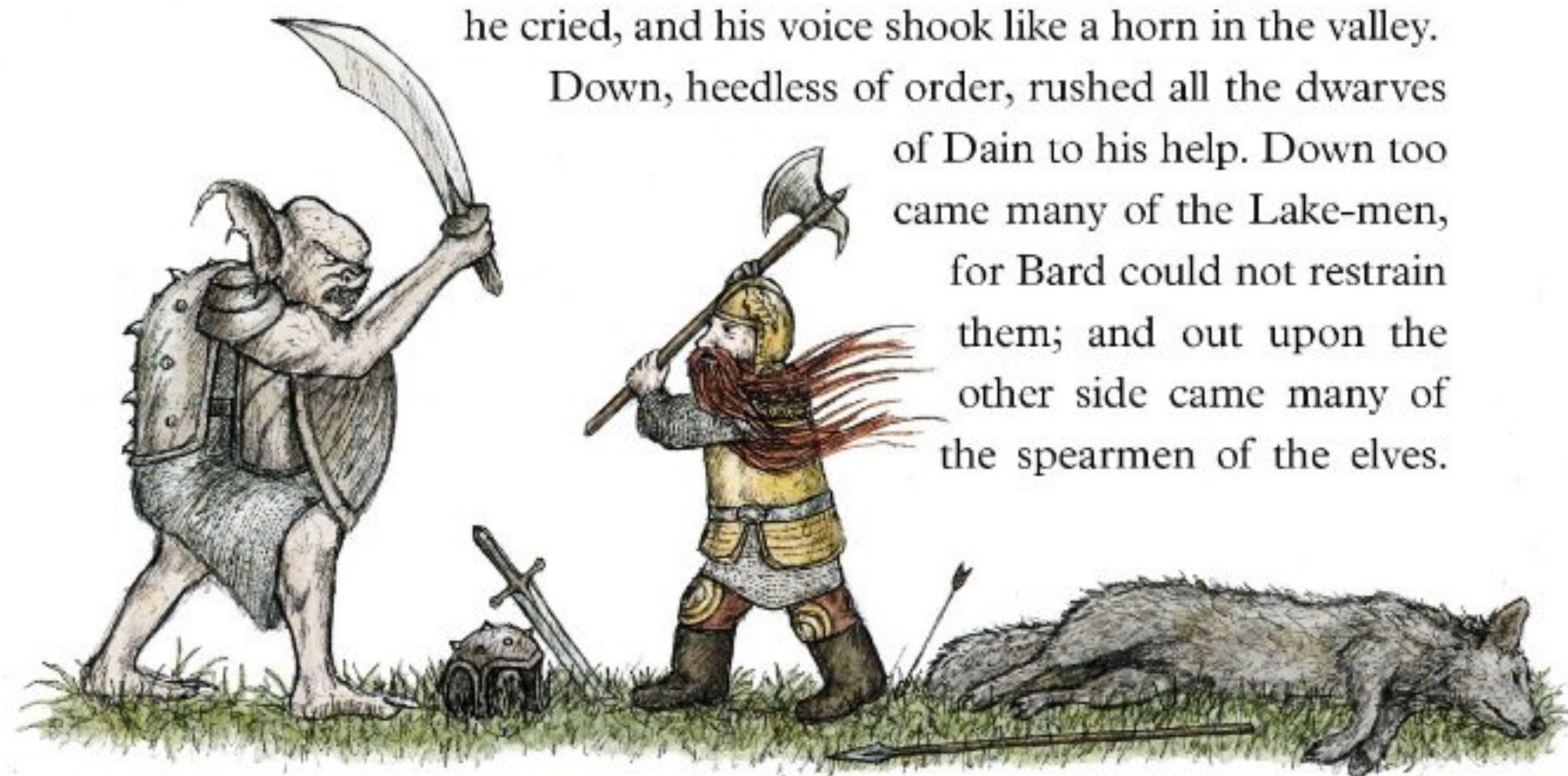
Day drew on. The goblins gathered again in the valley. There a host of Wargs came ravening and with them came the bodyguard of Bolg, goblins of huge size with scimitars of steel. Soon actual darkness was coming into a stormy sky; while still the great bats swirled about the heads and ears of elves and men, or fastened vampire-like on the stricken. Now Bard was fighting to defend the Eastern spur, and yet giving slowly back; and the elf-lords were at bay about their king upon the southern arm, near to the watch-post on Ravenhill.

Suddenly there was a great shout, and from the Gate came a trumpet call. They had forgotten Thorin! Part of the wall, moved by levers, fell outward with a crash into the pool. Out leapt the King under the Mountain, and his companions followed him. Hood and cloak were gone; they were in shining armour, and red light leapt from their eyes. In the gloom the great dwarf gleamed like gold in a dying fire.

Rocks were hurled down from on high by the goblins above; but they held on, leapt down to the falls' foot, and rushed forward to battle. Wolf and rider fell or fled before them. Thorin wielded his axe with mighty strokes, and nothing seemed to harm him.

"To me! To me! Elves and Men! To me! O my kinsfolk!" he cried, and his voice shook like a horn in the valley.

Down, heedless of order, rushed all the dwarves of Dain to his help. Down too came many of the Lake-men, for Bard could not restrain them; and out upon the other side came many of the spearmen of the elves.



Once again the goblins were stricken in the valley; and they were piled in heaps till Dale was dark and hideous with their corpses. The Wargs were scattered and Thorin drove right against the bodyguard of Bolg. But he could not pierce their ranks.

Already behind him among the goblin dead lay many men and many dwarves, and many a fair elf that should have lived yet long ages merrily in the wood. And as the valley widened his onset grew ever slower. His numbers were too few. His flanks were unguarded. Soon the attackers were attacked, and they were forced into a great ring, facing every way, hemmed all about with goblins and wolves returning to the assault. The bodyguard of Bolg came howling against them, and drove in upon their ranks like waves upon cliffs of sand. Their friends could not help them, for the assault from the Mountain was renewed with redoubled force, and upon either side men and elves were being slowly beaten down.

On all this Bilbo looked with misery. He had taken his stand on Ravenhill among the Elves—partly because there was more chance of escape from that point, and partly (with the more Tookish part of his mind) because if he was going to be in a last desperate stand, he preferred on the whole to defend the Elvenking. Gandalf, too, I may





to this day, all alone, unless the birds perch on them; for trolls, as you probably know, must be underground before dawn, or they go back to the stuff of the mountains they are made of, and never move again. That is what had happened to Bert and Tom and William.

“Excellent!” said Gandalf, as he stepped from behind a tree, and helped Bilbo to climb down out of a thorn-bush. Then Bilbo understood. It was the wizard’s voice that had kept the trolls bickering and quarrelling, until the light came and made an end of them.

The next thing was to untie the sacks and let out the dwarves. They were nearly suffocated, and very annoyed: they had not at all enjoyed lying there listening to the trolls making plans for roasting them and squashing them and mincing them. They had to hear Bilbo’s account of what had happened to him twice over, before they were satisfied.

“Silly time to go practising pinching and pocket-picking,” said Bombur, “when what we wanted was fire and food!”

“And that’s just what you wouldn’t have got of those fellows without a struggle, in any case,” said Gandalf. “Anyhow you are wasting time now. Don’t you realize that the trolls must have a cave or a hole dug somewhere near to hide from the sun in? We must look into it!”

They searched about, and soon found the marks of trolls’ stony boots going away through the trees. They followed the tracks up the hill, until hidden by bushes they came on a big door of stone leading to a cave. But they could not open it, not though they all pushed while Gandalf tried various incantations.

“Would this be any good?” asked Bilbo, when they were getting tired and angry. “I found it on the ground where the trolls had their fight.” He held out a largish key, though no doubt William had thought it very small and secret. It must have fallen out of his pocket, very