

THORIN (*drops pack, quickly and expertly draws a short sword*). Goblins! Ambush! To arms!

(*Several GOBLINS leap on: creepy, hunched-over, slaver-ing, horned creatures. Among them: a crowned and especially grisly-looking goblin: the King.*)

KING GOBLIN. Ooooooh, now heeere's some fun! (*Swings a huge club toward THORIN. THORIN expertly sidesteps the club: stabs into the KING's stomach. The KING goes down: the other GOBLINS shriek:*)

GOBLINS. The King! He killed the King! GET 'EM! (*The stage swarms fiercely with battle for an instant before lights blackout and there is silence.*)

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(*In darkness, water dripping. Cave noises. From the back of the theater, enter BILBO. Still pretty much in darkness; we have to hear his voice to see his dim shape as he picks his way through the audience toward the stage.*)

BILBO. Lucky me. Smack in the middle of an adventure at last. Mm-hmm. Don't come much more glorious than this. Lost in bottom of some Misty Mountain cavern which is no substitute for my comfortable hobbit hole. Wonder who'll inherit Bag End after I starve to death here? (*A tinkle of a bell, and a little flash of light on the ground.*) What's this? (*Another tinkle and flash of light. BILBO inspects, picks up something.*) A gold ring. How'd that get down here? Pretty thing, by the feel. Well, lucky me again. Well, here I am, lost, abandoned, foodless, nothing but this

little dagger between me and a goblin horde, but at least I've found this stupid gold ring. (*Absently puts it in pocket.*) Well, there's one good thing at least; it can't possibly get worse. (*As if in answer, a hissing noise from the stage area.*) Wrong again. Who's there? (*Hissing, then an ugly, repeated swallowing sound: "gollum."*) BILBO trembles, holds up dagger.) Careful now. You just stay back, whatever you are. I have a weapon.

VOICE (*hissing*). Does it?

(*From the darkness, the sound of water lapping, and we can begin to see a creature stepping forward: GOLLUM. GOLLUM was once a hobbit-like creature, but now he's a slimy nocturnal thing with webbed fingers and toes, no hair, huge eyes which glow. His body has bits of slightly glowing stuff as well. He always looks ready to spring. He speaks as he steps cautiously, ever so carefully, toward BILBO.*)

GOLLUM. Does it now? Has a nassssty little dagger, does it?

BILBO. Yes, I do, if by "it" you mean me. So you just keep your distance, if you please.

GOLLUM. Well blessss us and ssssplash usssss, my precioussssss. A dagger and ooooo so brave. We mussst keeeeeeep our distancsssssssse, musstn't we.

BILBO. Yes, you must.

GOLLUM. Why, then, we will, oh yessssssss, we're happy to, we've just eaten. But what is it, my preciouss? It's not a goblin, oh no, it issn't.

BILBO. Indeed I am not a goblin. I am Mister Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit.

GOLLUM. Hobbit, my preciousss?

BILBO. Yes, a well-respected hobbit with many friends in the Shire, let me tell you, who won't take kindly to anyone who does harm to me.

GOLLUM. No, no, nothing like it, no my preciousssss. But we're so lonely here, p'raps we sits here and chats with it a bitsy, my precious, p'raps we does. It likes riddles, p'raps it does, does it?

BILBO. Riddles?

GOLLUM. Yesssssss. What has roots as nobody sees, is taller than trees, up up it goes, and yet never grows?

BILBO. Well...mountain, I suppose.

GOLLUM. Oh, precious, it guesses eeeeeeeesy, it doesss. It must have a contest with usss, it musst. Ask us a riddle, yesssss, a contesssssst.

BILBO. Er...what's the prize in this contest?

GOLLUM. If it asks us, and we can't answer, then we does whatever it wants.

BILBO. Show me the way out of this place?

GOLLUM. If it likessssss, yessssss, of courssssssse.

BILBO. All right, then. What if you ask and I can't answer?

GOLLUM. Then it sets down its nassssty dagger and does what we wants.

BILBO. Such as what?

GOLLUM. Ask then. Riddle us, riddle us.

BILBO. Um...(Turns to audience.) Don't have much choice, do I? Do you know any riddles? Oh! (To GOLLUM.) Thirty white horses on a red hill: first they champ, then they stamp, then they stand still.

GOLLUM. Oooooooh, an oooooold one, preciousssss. Teeth is the answer, but we only has six. Heeere, now, my precious, we assks him: It cannot be seen, cannot be felt, cannot be heard, cannot be smelt, it lies behind stars and

under hills, and empty holes it fills. It comes firsssst and follows after, ends life, kills laughter. What isssssss it?

BILBO. Not seen, not felt, not heard, not smelt...some huge monster...behind stars, under hills, empty holes...(To us.) What is it?

GOLLUM. Not cheating is it, preciousssss?

BILBO. No no! Under hills, empty holes...Dark! The answer is dark.

GOLLUM. Ssssss.

BILBO. All right, then: A box without hinges, key, or lid, yet a golden treasure inside is hid. (To us.) I know it's an easy one, but I need to think of a better.

GOLLUM. Ssssss ssssssss nassssssty riddles with nassssty words like "golden."

BILBO. Well what's the answer, then? It's not a kettle boiling, if that's what you're imitating.

GOLLUM. Ssssss!! Give us a chance, let it give us a chansssse, my preciousssss. Golden treasure inside a box, no key, no lid...eggsses! Eggsses, it is! Nassssssty eggsses, from long ago when we lived in sunlight.

BILBO. Drat.

GOLLUM. Now it tells us: (*Moves threateningly toward him.*) This thing all things devourss: birds, beasts, trees; flowersss; gnaws iron, bites steel, grinds hard sstoness to meal, slays king, ruins town, beats the highessst mountains down. What is it, blesssss ussss?

BILBO. Ohhh, another horrible monster one. Slays kings and ruins towns, devours everything...some giant ogre or what I can't imagine...

GOLLUM. It must answer, my preciousssss.

BILBO. Yes yes. (To us.) Oh, you can sit there and know the answer probably, safe in your seats and not threatened by some slimy cave thing.