

Chapter 3

Keep Safe

"Where were we, again?" asks Mira.

"There was a starling, and a crazy hobbit-lass," said Bella.

"She's not crazy!" says Mira, crossly. "I think this might be Amaranth's grandmother. I was thinking she might have met papa a long time ago, because she said Shire hobbits had been to their home once when she was younger. Also, her name was Ricarda."

"She might have been great later," said Bella, "but she's acting crazy now. She wants to leave the place where Gandalf said to wait for them, and she throws rocks at the bird she raised since it was a chick. She's a lunatic."

"She just got rescued from orcs," said Mira, even more annoyed, "and she..."

"Go ahead, Mira," you say to interrupt things before they really get started, "read some more from Papa's journal. Please?"

* * * * *

I ran to catch up to Ricarda, who was now walking straight ahead with a frown on her face. Hildigard ran along with us, of course, and soon was going just in front of us, sniffing, listening, and looking for trouble. I looked



GERONTIUS



over at Ricarda, expecting her to say something more, but she did not. She did smile at me, a sort of desperate and pleading look in her eyes as she did it. I found her very confusing, and difficult to figure out, but Gandalf had said to stay with her and I felt like she might need help, so I walked alongside in silence for a time.

Eventually we came to a place where the path stopped, or rather went left and right, but not straight. I turned right, and was surprised when she did not. I stopped and looked back.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"You said we wanted to go to the heart of the forest," I said.

"Yes, but this is the way that leads to to forest's heart," she said, gesturing towards the left.

"Is it?" I asked, confused. I have problems with my left and right, sometimes.

"Yes, this is the way," said Ricarda, and she turned and began walking that way, then stopped and looked back to make sure I was going with her.

I frowned, then stopped and took Uncle Bullroarer's map out of my pack.

"Oh," I said, "I suppose you're right."

"What manner of map is that you have?" asked Ricarda. She spoke oddly sometimes.



RICARDA

"It's a map my great-uncle left me," I said distractedly, not looking up. I checked my left and right hands again, reoriented myself, and then put it back in my pack and began walking the way Ricarda had gone. At the time, it did not occur to me to ask how she knew which path led to the heart of Mathom Holt; I just take it for granted that everyone else has a better sense of direction than I do.

"Left me, left me," came the voice of the starling. Ricarda whirled around, her eyes wide and her movements jerky, and she heaved a stick in the general direction of the starling. It was a clumsy throw, jerky and uncoordinated, and the starling looked unperturbed, but it flew out of sight. I frowned, and thought of saying something, but then she turned and began walking again, fast, so I followed.

About half an hour later, it was no longer even dusk but rather night, and night inside a forest at that, but in the moonlight I saw the starling on a branch by the side of the path. I looked over at Ricarda, prepared to grab her arm if she tried to throw anything at it, but she did not look in its direction. She did seem to smile ever so slightly, however, as if she had noticed it there and was glad of it. Her eyes were shining, but focused resolutely on the path in front of her. I must admit that at that point nothing about her made any sense to me.

"I believe we may be to the heart of Mathom Holt now," I said eventually. In fact, I was starting to think we were going to soon exit the woods on the west side, having walked clear past the center some time ago, but as I said my own sense of direction is not great and I tend to defer to others on that, in most cases.



HILDIGARD



"We must go to Acallos, the Fall of the Flowers," Ricarda said. "Only there can we find the flowers we need."

"What?" I asked, bewildered.

"There, not far now," she said, and I saw that we were approaching the edge of the woods.

"Wait, Gandalf said that we should stay inside the forest," I said.

"There are flowers, which can be found only at Acallos, the waterfall just outside the forest," said Ricarda. "We must get them, at least a few. You must go to the falls, and..."

Just then, while I was standing there wondering whether I was going to walk with Ricarda or let her go on her own, Hildigard seemed to go crazy. She jumped in front of Ricarda, blocking her path, and barked loud and fast. Ricarda stopped, then tried to go around Hildigard. But Hildigard would have none of it, and moved quickly to block her path again, all the while barking fiercely. I walked up towards Ricarda to see if I could figure out what was going on, with either one of them really, but just before I got there, Ricarda stopped trying to get around her, and then dropped down to her knees.

Hildigard stopped barking, and just stood there, attentively looking at Ricarda. Then, oddly, Ricarda reached out and gave Hildigard a hug. For her part, Hildigard seemed no longer so excited, and her tail even wagged a bit.



GOLDBELLS

"You must, you must," came the voice of the starling, off to one side and further into the forest. "Not far now, not far now."

I was very confused.

* * * * *

"Aunt Mira? Aunt Mira, can I come in?"

"Yes, who is it?"

The door opens, and a young hobbit lady pops her head in. It is Jasmine Took, daughter of your brother Hildibrand.

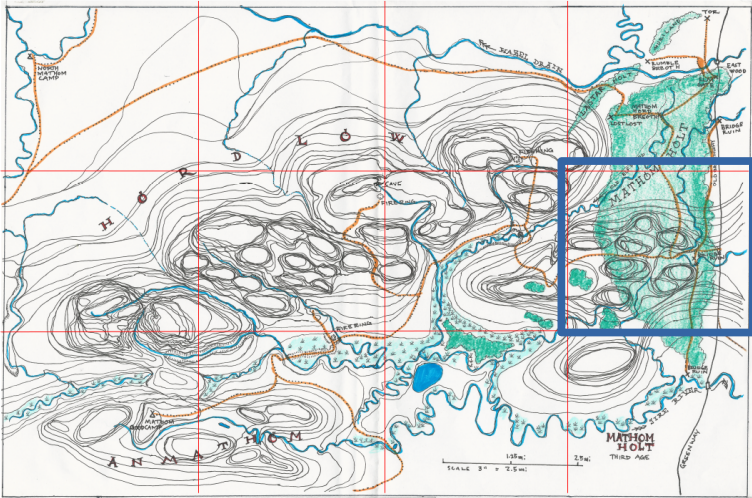
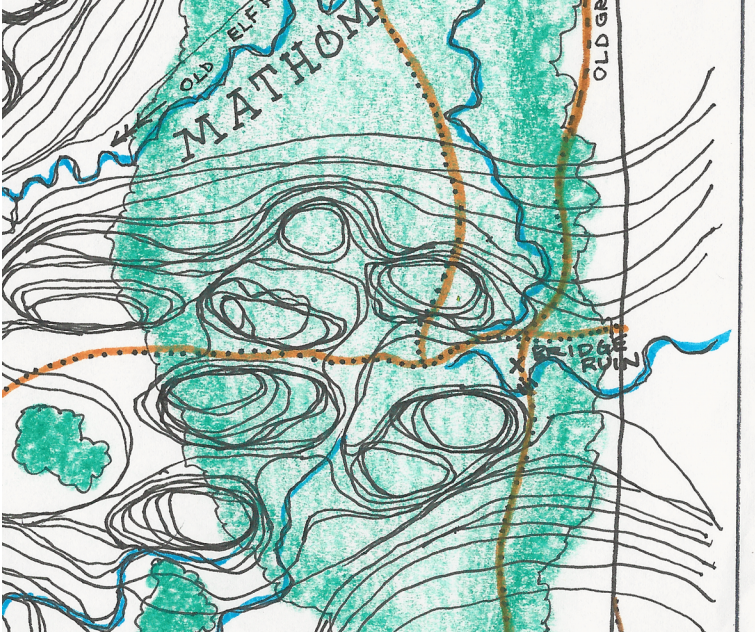
"Aunt Mira, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm having trouble with the pies and the soup doesn't taste right and I'm not sure if some of the roots are still all right to use or not, and I'm wondering if you have any time to pop up to the kitchen and help me out?"

"Sure, Jasmine, no problem. Bella, can you...?"

"Oh sure," says Bella with a bit of a grimace. "If there's two or three of us we can probably help sort it out quicker."

Your sisters look over at you, expectantly. You feel a slight twinge of guilt, since your sisters seem to think you should also help with the cooking, but you really want to do some more investigating around Great Smials.

"No problem," you say, "I'll just go look into a few things while you two help out Jasmine."



You turn to quickly exit the room, before they have a chance to say anything. Once safely outside your father's chamber, do you:

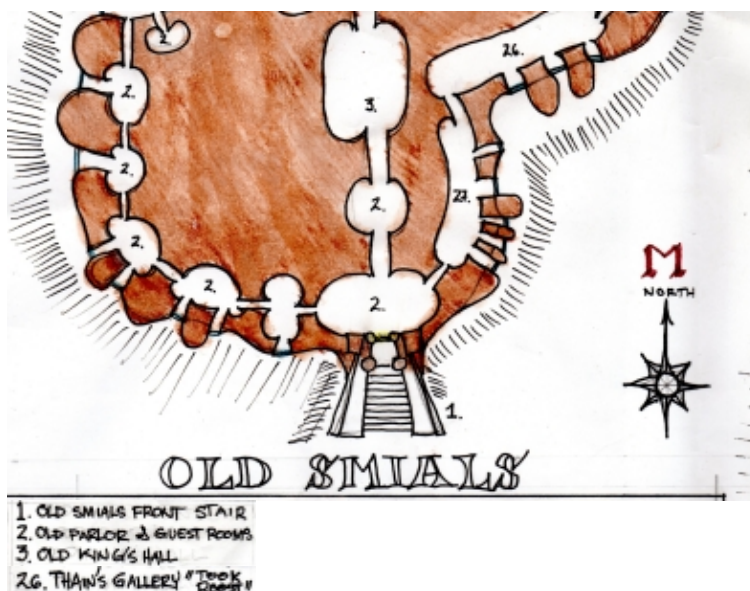
1) Check out the Guest Rooms, where visitors to Great Smials (other than Took's such as yourself) stay? There are many hobbits from Tuckborough living their now.

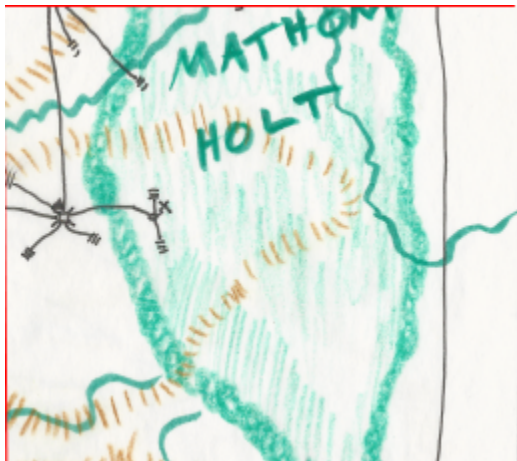
Page 13

2) Visit the Old King's Hall, where stories claim that the last King of Arthedain was once received when he came to visit the Shire? Page 18

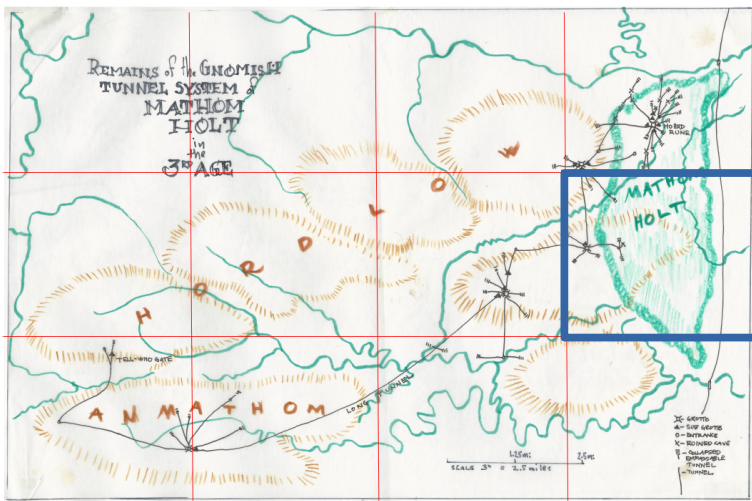
3) Look at the paintings and other artwork in the Thain's Gallery? Page 23


4) Go to the Old Smials Front Stair and look outside to see if the winter's icy grip has relaxed at all? With fresh snow, you should be able to see tracks of anything or anyone coming or going. Page 26





Belongground



Along the southwest corner of Old Smials, there are a half dozen guest rooms. Near the Old Smials Front Stair and Old Parlour, they are rarely used now. However, from time to time when many families from around the Shire visit Great Smials at once, as for example when you got married to Hugo Boffin, even these rooms get dusted and cleaned and put into service.

Most of them are, in fact, in use right now. The winter is very harsh, and a few of the poorer Hobbit families that lived in houses aboveground, have had their homes flattened by windstorms or buried in snow. Great Smials was originally intended as a refuge for hobbits in time of war, and it has been centuries since it was needed for that, but it is now functioning as a refuge from the harshest winter in living memory.

As you approach the row of guest rooms, you hear the sounds of shouting and laughing children. The families of Tuckborough that are taking refuge here are all young, which accounts in part for why they had smaller houses.

Those hobbits who live aboveground (and many of those who live belowground) tend to add on to their homes year after year, reinforcing and expanding, and thus it is those who had to build new homes to move into, that have found this year's wind and snow too much for their new, small homes to withstand.

You peek in through open doors and see families from Tuckborough chatting, mending socks, weaving, or doing whatever else they are able to in the small space they have. In those cases where you know them well from your childhood, you stop and chat for a while, then move on. They are mostly happy to be in a warm and secure place, but of course also worried about the work it will take in the spring to reconstruct a home for themselves. For the moment, being thrown together with so many others has led to an almost festive atmosphere, but you suspect that as the winter drags on they may long for a bit more privacy.

Numerous hobbit-lads and hobbit-lasses chase each other back and forth down the hallway, shouting at each other in (mostly) happy voices. One of them, a young hobbit-lass of about 8 years of age, stops and looks up at you with big eyes.

"Hello," you say.

"Are you a Took?" she asks in a tiny voice.

"Yes," you answer, "or I used to be. Now I'm a Boffin. My name is Donnamira. What is your name?"

"Daisy," she says. "Are you part fairy?"


"What?" you ask, astonished. "No, I'm all hobbit, I believe. Why do you ask?"

"They say that one of the Tooks had a fairy as a wife," says Daisy, suddenly looking bashful. Then, turning, she runs off. You wonder where she would have heard such a thing.

You consider chasing her down to ask, but decide against it. You have spent enough time chatting with neighbors from your childhood; it is probably time to return to your father's room and see if Mira and Bella are back yet.

Ever since you found out your
destroying the box and its
be kept by the King of
the key and the Rhudaur
remembered that the three
As you have moved around
far away the compass would
dug into the hillside. You
was something that arrived
Ricarda had long before, he
you, that it does not do, to
suspicious. You have the
be as strong after so many
Then he put one of the new,
worried that the sorcerer
kept in reserve.
master key you took from the
life and your father's will
father gone to? Well, he is
entrance to Great Smials
was then a small underground
before. But the sorcerer is

father was trying to pick
contents in the process),
Arthedain. The second way
lockbox are in the
lockboxes are [linked](#) to each
Great Smials, you have
always point in the same
thought at first that it was
only recently, so it was no
has fallen under the
be observed while observing.
old, pressed flowers from
years. Something newer and
fresh goldbell flowers above
was a necromancer as well,
Regardless, he made certain
Great Smials Vault will open
depend on it. You put the
not able to control where he
that your father had
armoury. It was sealed off
ancient as well, and he knew

In the days of the Shire's founding, it was two hobbits named Marcho and Blanco who appeared before the King of Arthedain, and asked permission for hobbits to come settle there. They were anxious to leave the regions, further south and east, where they had been living, because those kingdoms had fallen apart into disorder and no small amount of banditry. Hobbits are better at farming and quiet, productive craftsmanship, than they are at war, and Arthedain seemed to be strong enough to defend them, and itself.

It turned out, of course, that the hobbits of the Shire far outlasted the Kingdom of Arthedain, which was destroyed in a war with the Witch-King of Angmar nearly 1,000 years ago. But for the first few centuries of the Shire's existence, it existed under the protection of the King of Arthedain, whose capital was at Fornost Erain to the north. It was he who had actually ordered the first part of Great Smials built, as an underground armoury to store weapons in.

Years later, the hobbits enlarged it into a home to live in, and sealed up the old armoury entrance in favor of a new front door on the south side. They also built a room very near the new front door, called it the "King's Hall", and set it up as a place for the King to hold court in the unlikely event that he should ever wish to do so in the Shire. There was even a man-sized throne made, and it sits there still against one wall, raised up on a dais so that it commands a view of the entire room. Legend has it that this room was made just in case the King should ever show up, want to look in at his armoury, and perhaps become upset that it had been converted into a Smial for hobbits to live in.

Legend says that, one time, the heir to the last king of Arthedain did actually use this room. The long war with the Witch-King of Angmar had ended, with Angmar destroyed but Arthedain also too broken to be put back together as a kingdom. The prince, Arnanth, did not become King after his father died during that war, because there was no kingdom left to rule. Instead, he took the title "Chieftain of the Dunedain", and became head of the Rangers, the few Dunedain who remained in the north. He came here to the Shire, and sat in this room, as he discussed with the leading hobbits of the Four Farthings what would happen now. They created the title of "Thain", who would serve as military leader of the Shire in place of the old King of Arthedain, and chose Bucca of the Marish as the first Thain. He and Arnanth agreed that the hobbits of the Shire would send a tribute of food to the Rangers every year, and in return the Rangers would help to patrol for orcs, wolves, or whatever else might come to menace them.

Now, it is basically a junkroom.

Other than the throne, you cannot see a single thing here that should not be taken outside and burned, buried, or used for scrap. Broken furniture which cannot be repaired, broken farm equipment which is too big or awkwardly shaped to melt down into something useful, barrels of old scroll-cases with documents that are not important enough to be put into the library, and all manner of other things which no one will ever want, but which unaccountably are not discarded. You pick your way carefully among the wreckage, wondering if this room is not, in some ways, a symbol of the old Kingdom.

You recall, as a very young child, the first time you discovered this room. You were playing hide-and-seek with Bella (Mira was not walking yet), and you ran into this room to hide. With a start, you realized that if you left your little candle lantern burning, you would be too easy to find, so without thinking you blew it out, and were instantly terrified of being in utter darkness in a room you knew nothing about. You clambered around, under, and through the piles of broken furniture, getting more and more hopelessly entangled and lost, until finally you began crying in fear and frustration.

Bella soon arrived, with a candle's warm glow, and rescued you.

"Silly lass," she said lightly as she wrapped you in a reassuring hug, "you have to hide in a room that already has light in it. We never come in here!"

Of course, you came back the next day, with a light, and thoroughly explored every corner of it until you knew it well. It looks to you as if not much has changed in this room since you left Great Smials. But, you recall, you never did examine the throne closely. You had approached it, thinking to see what it was like to sit in a King's throne, but at the last moment did not. It seemed ominous, like a place for ghosts, and you left it alone. On a whim, you decide to do it now.


You step up onto the dais, and lift your lantern higher to cast its light on every part of the throne. You turn around, and sit down gently on the it.

The view of the room around you is not so different, but it is from a slightly higher perspective. From this point, it looks not unlike what you imagine a forest would look like as seen by a bird in flight. Odd table or chair legs jut up from overturned furniture, odd poles or spikes or handles from broken farm equipment, piles of lumber which were meant to be used but never were, it all gives the impression of the leafless branches of trees in winter.

The dais is the only part of this room which is not cluttered. It occurs to you to wonder why that is so, since it seems beyond unlikely for a king to ever need to sit here again, and even if they did, there is so much other clutter that would need to be removed from the room in any case.

It is almost, you realize, as if there were some particular reason not to put anything on this dais. As if something bad would happen to anything put on this dais? The dais that you, so to speak, put yourself on.

You get up with a start, and nearly run back out of the room. When you reach your father's chamber, Bella is there, and you give her a hug again, just as if you were five. Exploring again after many years the home you grew up in, it can bring up old ghosts.

The Thain's Gallery, sometimes referred to as the "Took Roost", is where your father (and his fathers before him) put their favorite artwork.


The art of the Shire is, for the most part, of a practical sort. It is carved into wooden furniture, painted onto tiles in the kitchen or washroom, woven into bedspreads, or dyed onto festival clothing. There is also a healthy tradition of making food which is both tasty and visually appealing. Rarely does a Shire hobbit's artistry turn to paint on canvas, for no reason other than to be looked at. But, on occasion, a Hobbit will try their hands at painting (or drawing with ink), and some of those hang here in the Sunset Gallery. Most are of your ancestors in the Took family. Someone, perhaps your father, perhaps someone before him, compared all of the Took portraits on the walls to crows roosting in a tree, and the name "Took Roost" has been used for this room (or series of rooms actually) ever since.

There is your grandfather, Fortinbras, and your great-grandfather, Ferumbras, and your great-great-grandfather, Isumbras. There are great-aunts and great-great-uncles you never knew. There are portraits of your mother, Adamanta, and all your many siblings. You look longest at the portrait of Hildifons, your brother who went away in your youth, and never returned. You have often wondered what happened to him, or if he still lives somewhere far away, and if so whether or not he ever thinks of you.

You also pause at the portrait of Bandobras, known as "Bullroarer". His portrait had been taken down, at one time, after a rupture of some sort between your great-grandfather and other Took. When you were in the Took's Roost last, years before, it was still missing. It must have been your father who found this portrait and put it back up; he was quite fond of his "uncle Bullroarer", as he called him.

On an impulse, you take a peek behind the frame, and there between the canvas and the wall it hangs on, you find an envelope hidden. You take it out, and find that it contains several papers, some of them quite old. With a shock, you realize that this must be the packet of papers that your father took from his uncle Bullroarer's desk after he died. You see several maps, and notes from Bullroarer about his travels, and also sketches he made while planning his new smial at Long Cleeve. But what you do NOT find, is the map of Mathom Holt, that he was referencing in the journal you were just listening to Mira read aloud. Where did that map, of all maps, end up, you wonder?

Come to think of it, you have been gone from your father's room for some time. It may be time to head back there, and see if your sisters are back yet. You restore the packet of papers to its hiding place, then think better of it and tuck it inside your small handbag, and head back.

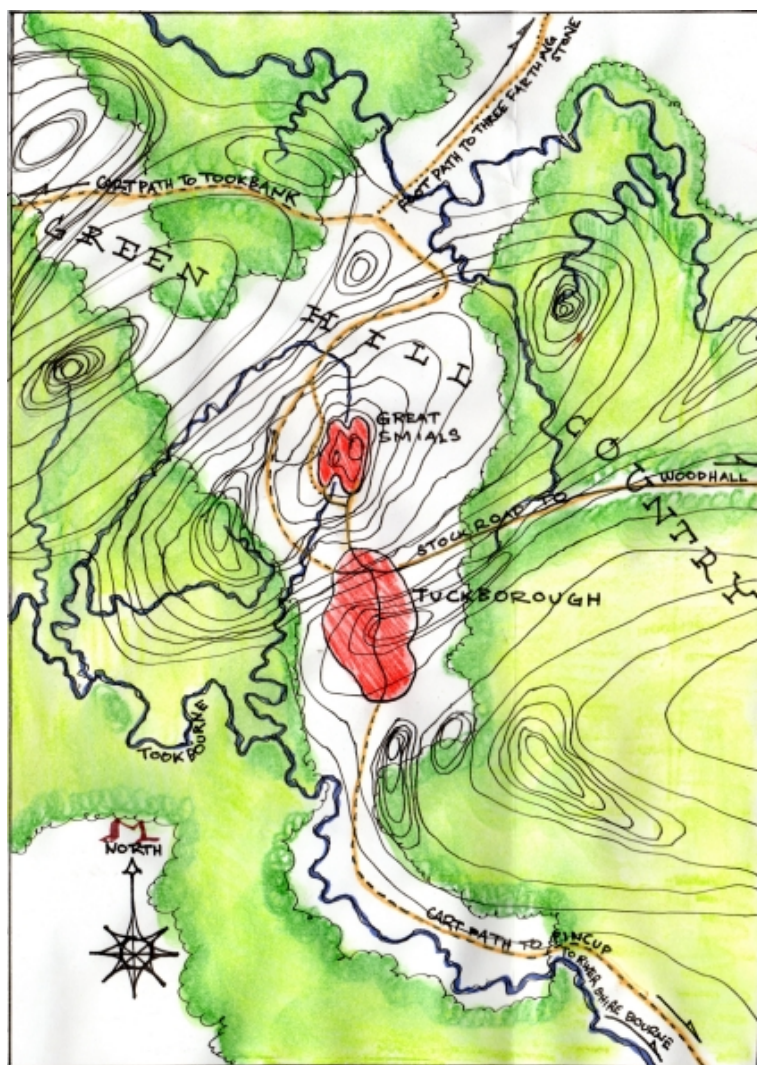


The Old Smials Front Door is only infrequently opened in recent centuries. Just now, however, as the guest rooms near to it house numerous hobbits from nearby

Tuckborough whose homes have collapsed under the weight of snow, it is once again in frequent use. It has a smaller sized door, hobbit sized, within the larger round door which has probably not been opened since the last time a Shiremoot happened in the Old Smials (the older, western side of Great Smials). You, also, content yourself with opening the much smaller inner door, and letting yourself out into the cold for a few moments.

It is bitter cold outside, and you are immediately sent back indoors to borrow a cape from one of the guests. Thus insulated, you return to walk down the steps of the old front door, and look around. Ahead of you, the small road leads towards Tuckborough, a few minutes walk south. The smaller smials, and aboveground homes, of Tuckborough are all closed up, showing nothing to the world of their inhabitants except for a few whips of smoke from hearthfires.





To your right is the orchard, now bare of leaves or fruit. You walk that way, and looking about you are surprised to see the tracks of something else in the snow. They are not recent enough to know for sure what manner of beast it was, but it walked close to Great Smials, headed towards the north side. You follow it.

Walking around to the northwest corner of Great Smials, you see the tracks end. You are no great Ranger, but if you read the tracks aright, it appears that whatever type of beast it was, it burrowed beneath the snow here. Every once in a great while a mole will poke its head into the walls of the outer passageways of Great Smials, in those places where they are not lined in stone, but these tracks look far too large for that. Perhaps a badger? You have been in a badger's sett, long ago, but you were a much smaller hobbit-lass then, and these tracks look larger even than a badger would make. If it were not so snowed over, perhaps you could tell something about what it was.

Of course, it may not truly be intending to dig into the earth; it may simply be burrowing under the snow. Perhaps you should mention it to one of your brothers, in case they need to send the creature on its way. In the meantime, you are getting quite cold, even with the borrowed cape around your shoulders, and decide to head back inside and see if your sisters are back to your father's room yet.



Goldogirn script, in brushstrokes (part 1)



Goldogirn script, in brushstrokes (part 2)

