

Chapter 5

A Dimly Lit Path

"Finally," says Mira when you step back into your father's room. "We were about to start without you."

"Is he awake?" you ask, looking over to see him open his eyes in response. He starts to say something, but then closes his mouth again and grimaces.

"Papa, are you feeling all right?" you ask.

"Yes, I am fine, albeit somewhat fatigued," he says.

"Please instruct your sister that she may continue with her narration. It pleases me to hear her read it back to me. Many the year has passed since those days."

You look over at your sisters and frown, then take a seat next to them. You think about asking your father more questions, but he has closed his eyes again. Mira opens his journal to where she left off, and begins to read.

* * * * *

I was about to order Hildigard to run away, even though I was not sure if she would understand, since I didn't want her to get killed along with the rest of us, when I saw something I hadn't before.



WHO

There was a small cave opening, there where the path curved to follow the stream uphill to the falls. I had not seen it before; it was not large, it was night, and I was coming the opposite way. Standing near the falls, though, with the moonlight at the right angle, I could see that behind the vegetation was an opening, big enough for a hobbit or bigger even. I had no other options, and I sprinted for it, still carrying the flowers with me even though I wasn't sure why.

We plunged in, all three of us. Actually all four of us though I did not know it at the time; the starling had flown after Ricarda, as she came after me. I heard a rumbling noise in front of us, but could not see what it was. My heart leapt inside me, but the floor seemed stable below me and the roof wasn't falling down on me, so I kept going. Almost immediately, we came to a split, where we had to choose left or right. I wanted to go back towards the forest of Mathom Holt, so I should have turned left, and therefore I turned right of course. Curse me, but it was some time before I realized that.

After we had gone forward a few dozen steps, we heard a rumbling noise again, and then a thud. The sounds of the waterfall, and the shouting orcs chasing us, all went away. We were sealed underground, in the pitch black.

Well, not quite pitch black. After a few moments, as our eyes adjusted, we realized that the four flowers I was still carrying, gave off a faint golden light. I guess that's why they had seemed to have color even in the moonlight. We stood there for a few moments, just looking at them, our hearts still thumping in our chests from the run and the

10	15	16	12
22	14	14	10
13	11	13	13

Goldogorin numbers on the back of the tiles

fright, and gradually we caught our breath and became calmer.

"We should move on," I said, "in case they figure out how to open it up again."

What I did not say, or probably need to, was that I did not know how the passageway had opened for us in the first place, or closed after us. Looking back on it now, I believe it was the flowers we had with us that caused them to open, or perhaps I should say caused them to be opened.

"Move on," said the starling. "Figure out how, figure out how."

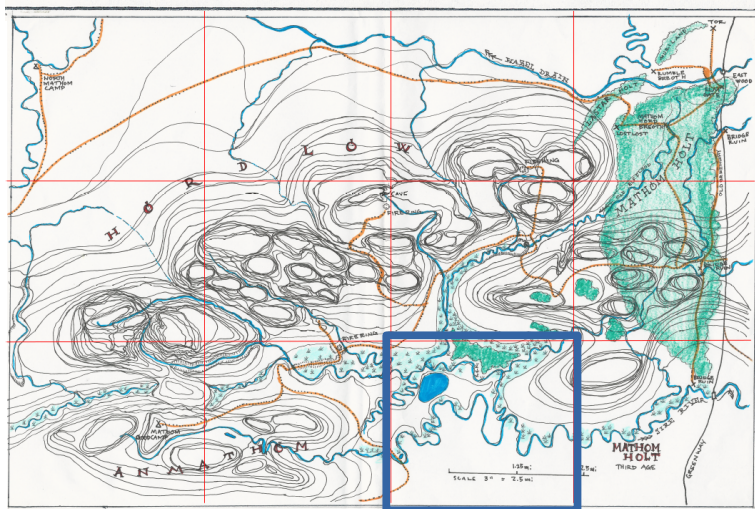
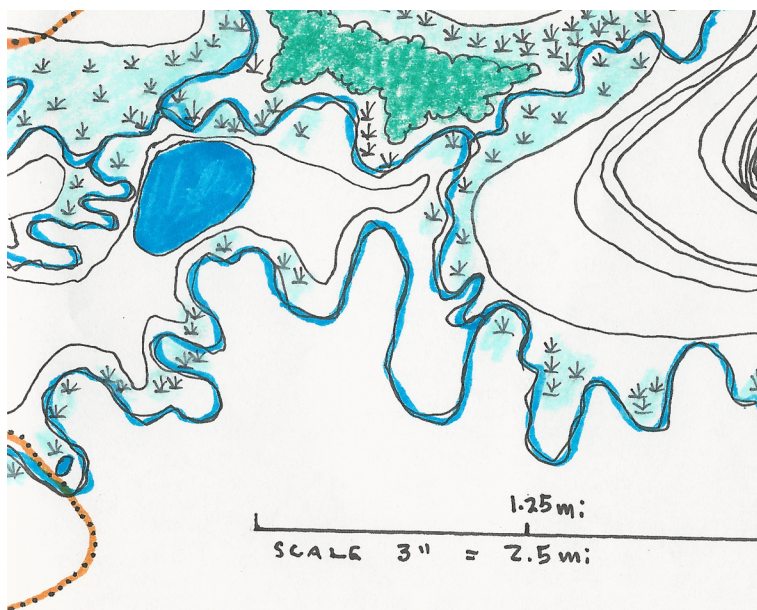
"Who!" said Ricarda, delighted. "I'm so glad you stuck with me, when that horrible man made me throw things! I tried to stop him but I couldn't!" The little bird came and landed on Ricarda's upheld hand, then hopped up her arm to perch on her shoulder.

"That explains why you threw it so badly, though," I said. "Your efforts to stop it may have done some good."

We walked along for a short time, and then came to a point where the floor in front of us had a sort of grid on it, 3 boxes tall and 4 wide. There were also tiles nearby, a stack of 12 of them, though a few were cracked.

"What is that, I wonder?" asked Ricarda.

I didn't know, but I did see right away that the tiles were just the right size to fit in the grid boxes. I started to put



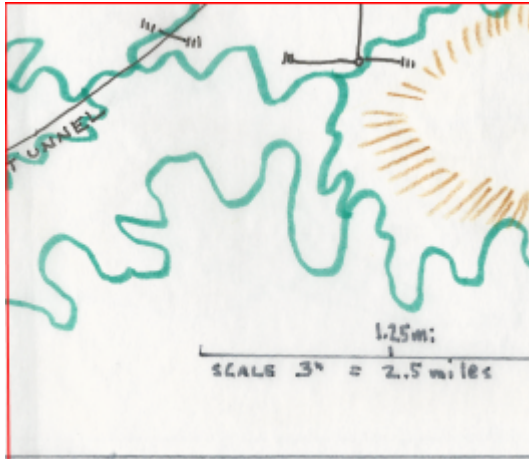
them into place, one tile in each box in the grid, in some cases having to assemble the pieces of the broken tiles. When it was done, I had something that looked like a pile of fruit tree branches that had been pruned and left in a pile, or perhaps the tunnels of a mole that had gotten drunk while digging. It made little sense to me, and I was wondering why I had bothered putting it together.

"It looks like they're in the wrong order," said Ricarda.

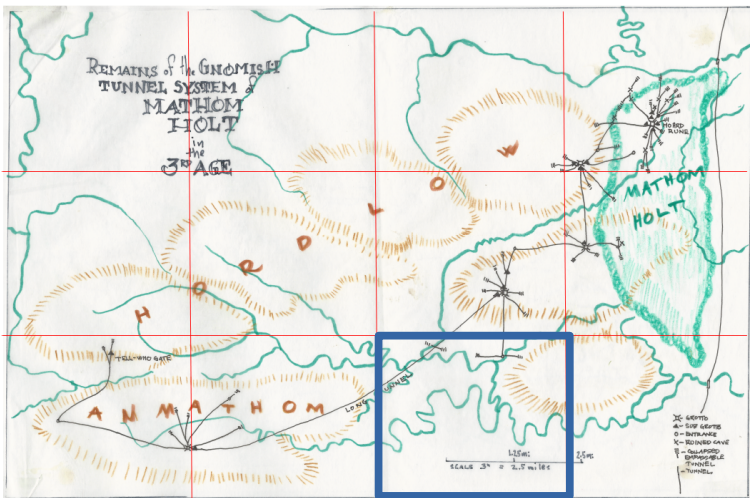
"Oh, of course," I said. I had just put the tiles down in the order they were stacked there. I realized they could have been put in almost any order, and for a moment I thought I would shuffle them around until they seemed right. Then, almost immediately, I realized a few things. First, there were far too many possible arrangements for me to try them all. Second, since I did not know what it was supposed to look like when it was done, I would have a very difficult time figuring out what the right arrangement was. Last, I had better things to do than rearrange tiles on the floor.

"Wrong, wrong..." said Who, and the little bird's voice echoed loudly in the underground space.

"I guess we should just move on," I said, and we stepped carefully around the tiles on the grid, and continued down the passageway. Not long after, we came to a place where the passageway sloped downwards, and then shortly after that it split into several different directions. We tried the middle one, but then that split again almost immediately, and when we stayed with the middle one again it came to a dead end. Ricarda and I looked at each other, backtracked, and then tried a different way. It also split



Belowground



into several separate passageways, almost immediately. We stopped again.

"I think we will get lost," said Ricarda. "Maybe we should go back, while we can still find our way back, and try something with more of a system."

"I expect you are correct," I said, and we retreated back to where we had started. I rummaged around in my small pack until I found a small piece of flint, which I used for starting fires. With the edge of that flint we marked on the walls, not much but enough to see we had gone that way before. Then, we made our way through the small maze, marking every way we had already gone to that led to a dead end, until finally we made our way through to the regular passageway again. It was not a large maze, I could have walked through it in a very short time if I had known the right way, but it took some time to get through it without knowing. Once out the other side the passageway rose again, and became drier. It had been damp and even mossy in places inside the maze.

We had walked on for only a few minutes more when Hildigard turned and looked behind us, ears alert, listening and sniffing the air.

"I hear it, too," said Ricarda.

Then even I heard it, from behind us, the soft sounds of water gently filling up the passageway behind us. I walked back a short distance, to where the passageway had come up from the lower maze of dead ends and small splits, and saw that it was now filled with water. If you were to go through the maze now, you would have to

swim, and hold your breath as you did so. It occurred to me that, while it had been slightly annoying to navigate the maze while walking, if I were trying to do it while I was holding my breath it would have been a lot worse.

I turned around, and walked back to Ricarda, Hildigard, and Who. Ricarda, at least, was thinking the same thing as I, and perhaps Hildigard as well.

"I think," I said, "I have a good guess what those tiles on the grid on the floor were meant to show. If you know how to arrange it."

"I expect you are correct," said Ricarda. "and if you do arrange them correctly, they probably end up looking like that."

There, on the ground just behind her, was another grid, but in this case the pattern was etched into the floor.

"So," I said, "if you make it through the maze, while holding your breath and swimming, you are rewarded with...a map of the maze you just made it through."

"You just made it through," said Who the starling.

"Yes," said Ricarda, "yes we did."

* * * * *

"Aunt Bella?" comes a call at the door. "Are you in there?"

"Yes, who is it?" asked Bella. Adalgrim Took, your nephew and a new father, pops his head in through the doorway.

"Aunt Bella, I'm sorry to trouble you, but my wife is having an awful time getting little Ivy to sleep. I would ask my mum to help her, but she's busy with some of the other children right now, and I don't seem to be of any use for this, so I was just wondering..."

"Oh sure," said Bella, getting up. She married into the Baggins family, whereas Adalgrim's mother Rosa was a Baggins who had married into the Took family, so of the three of you she is the one best known to them. "Perhaps we can sing her a few lullabies."

"We've already tried that," says Adalgrim, "but it wouldn't hurt to give it another go, I suppose."

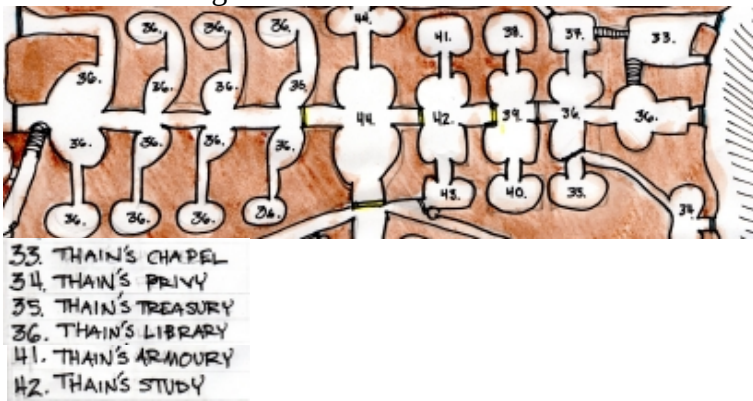
"Well if that doesn't work we can always try rum," says Bella as she heads out the door. You wonder if she was serious about that. You and Mira look at each other.

"If I said I was going to give rum to a baby, she would explode at me," says Mira. "Although I seem to recall hearing that our mum used to do that with me, just a tiny bit."

You find that hard to believe, as your mother was none too keen on alcohol of any sort for anyone, but there are always surprises in life. It occurs to you that, while you wait for Bella to return, you could do a bit more exploring.

Do you:

- 1) Look around your father's study? Page 13
- 2) Visit the Thain's Armoury, where weapons and armour are stored? Page 19
- 3) Sneak into the Thain's Treasury, which functions as a sort of bank for the Shire? Page 23
- 4) Step into the Thain's Chapel, a seldom-used but important chamber set aside for use during special ceremonies? Page 27



5			

What, exactly, is a "study", anyway? It is somewhat different from a library, and goodness knows your father has plenty of those rooms, and from time to time he may settle down to study one of his library books right there near where it normally sits on the shelves. It is different as well from an office, which is very near to the chamber your father sleeps in, though both study and office have a desk.

The principal difference, in your father's case anyway, seems to be the state of mind it is intended for, not the items found in it. The office is where he reads letters related to business, settles his accounting, makes business plans related to sowing and harvesting, and so on. The study, on the other hand, is where he goes to dig into a topic that may be of less immediate urgency or importance, but which he finds of interest for some other reason. For example, the ants.

For several years, your father kept several different ant colonies in his study, in a sort of aquarium for ants. In

place of water, it had dirt, kept between panes of glass that were separated by only a small distance, so that very often their tunnels would be visible from the side. He would put food, whether seeds or leaves or whatever else, in at the top, and observe how workers would find it, bring it below ground (sometimes having to chop it into pieces first), and store and share it. He took notes on what he fed them and how they reacted, he made drawings of their tunneled complexes from time to time, he tried different kinds of soil to see if they could adapt to sand or loam or clay equally well. It lasted for nearly a decade, and on more than one occasion the ants found a way to escape their glass enclosure, sometimes sending scouts several rooms over to the Thain's Pantry. Your father discovered this on one occasion when he was curious as to why the ants were not eating the leaves of grass he had left them, and then realized they were bringing back crumbs of apple pie. You found yourself in sympathy with the ants, there, although you also had some sympathy for your mother when she insisted as a result that the ants' glass homes be taken outside.

As a young hobbit-lass, you would sometimes watch them, alone in the study or with your father, and imagine that they were tiny hobbits, and the burrows were their equivalent of Great Smials.

Looking around the study now, you try to determine what your father's latest project was. He appears to have a great deal of mapmaking equipment, as well as old maps from all over the region. You look at each one of them, trying to see what they have in common. Eventually, you realize that they all show at least a small part of the Misty Mountains, the mountain chain well to the east of the

Shire. In particular, your father seems to have been interested in the northern part, close to the Ettenmoors. Now why would that be?

You can think of two reasons. First, while you do not know the details, you are aware that at some point in his youth, your father had some manner of interaction with a giant in the mountains. The Ettenmoors, legend has it, might be a home to giants and trolls.

The second reason is that the Dunadan sorcerer, who you know your father was thinking about recently, was thought to be living in the highest peaks of the northern reaches of the Misty Mountains, as a place where it was always cold. If your father was looking at maps of that region, or perhaps even himself trying to combine them into a single map, he might have been wondering where the sorcerer lived.

Looking through the other pages on the desk, you see notes like "40 leagues: Mount Gram to Weathertop", "30 leagues: Weathertop to Buckland", "20 leagues: Buckland to Great Smials". Some of them have question marks, and some of them have notes like "longer if you avoid being seen on the road?" Then, you find the question that confirms what it was all for.


"How fast can he walk?"

Your father was trying to determine how long it would be, after the sorcerer left his home in the Misty Mountains, before he reached Great Smials. Whatever time he had concluded, it happened faster than he expected. Time flies.

the lock on the Arthedain
you need to find another way
to open it, is to put it
possession of the sorcerer.
other in another way; each
noticed which way it is
direction), and that he is
a badger or some other
ordinary burrowing
sorcerer's spell. It's been
You made certain not to let
the Treasury, of course,
fresher might be
every entrance to Great
and could animate the dead.
that it was kept
it. You sprint down to the
flower in your hair, poking
goes to, as Ricarda was not
forgotten about, because it
when that armoury was
about Argeleb's Armoury,

lockbox, you have been
to open it. But, there are
next to the lockbox of the
The only way to open the
one has a compass that
pointing, and how it has
northwest of you. The
burrowing animal, but Erling
animal. Your father's poem,
clear for some time that the
on that you could tell your
still in the ledger book in
required. Your father grew
Smials...that he knew about.
Perhaps he just thought that
watered. If you had to find
crypts, open the locked
its stem through one of your
when she was controlled by
was sealed centuries ago.
enlarged, and turned into
that used to be on this

Speaking of which, you decide it has been long enough that Bella has probably returned to your father's bedside. You must hurry back, or Mira may start reading his journal without you.

The Thain's Armoury is, in theory, where the Thain would store his own personal weapons and armour, in preparation for the possibility of war. The Shire has not been involved in anything approaching a war since the time your father's great-uncle Bullroarer led the Shire Hobbits against the invading goblins of Mount Gram. Even that was, really, only a single battle, and in fact the Thain (Bullroarer's older brother) did not know about the invaders until they had already been defeated, so there was no time for his armoury to be of any use. In fact, the last time the Hobbits of the Shire sent troops to a war, was near to the beginning of its history, during the war between Angmar and Arthedain. Thus, as far as you are able to tell, the Thain's Armoury has never, in fact, been put to use.

But that's only if you think the purpose of it is only to store weapons and armour for the Thain to use in time of war. There are other uses for it.

For example, from time to time there may be ruffians who attempt to steal cattle from herds kept near the edges of the Shire. There are a group of hobbits, the "Shire Reeves", who patrol the borders of the Shire, and it is part of their job to send any such uninvited guests in a different direction. The Thain does not normally accompany the Shire Reeves, but if there is more trouble than usual or a matter of special importance requires more senior judgment, he may go along. You can only recall one time when your father did this, which was when a disputed transaction between a hobbit sheepherder and a Man from east of the Shire led to mutual accusations of double-dealing, and it looked like it was going to lead to blows. He put on his helm, strapped a sword to his side, and rode off to adjudicate. "Speak politely, but wear your battle helm," was a common saying among the more adventurous Tooks or Brandybucks, and your father took it literally at times. Not very many times, though.

The door to the Thain's Armoury is, of course, locked. The lock is a very good one, perhaps of dwarven manufacture, which would be very difficult to pick or force. The door that it is set in, is thick wood, banded together with iron. No one is getting through that door unless they have the key.

Fortunately, the Thain's Armoury is right next to the Thain's Study, and your father keeps the key in his desk there. It is the heavy, black iron key with a label on it that says "Armoury", which is kept in the back of the top right drawer. You know this from having gone through your father's desk years before; he never locks his desk. It turns out that this "hiding" place is thought to be good enough, because he has not changed it in the decades since

you discovered it. His Study is empty, so you grab it on your way to investigate the Armoury.


Inside the Armoury, your first impression is that he must come here occasionally, because the weapons and armour are mostly metal, and they are not covered in rust. It is hard to believe that he really spends as much time as it would require to keep it all rust-free, which means he must get help from someone. Does he have hired help polish it? Does he know some secret to keeping rust away from sword, helm, and the other metal pieces in here? Or does he spend more time in here than you think?

You also notice, that he has far more armour and weaponry in here than a single hobbit needs, even if he lived in a more warlike time. How many helms can one actually use? You are reminded of your sister-in-law, Rosemary, who has more bonnets than days in a month. You go along the row of helmets, each sitting on a small stand, all arranged on a shelf attached to the wall. Some have a sort of tuft on the top, like a bird. Some have small horns. Some are plain and black iron, and you wonder how one could keep one's head upright with that much weight on it. Near the end, you see one that catches your eye in particular.

It has a small line of characters along the back, near the neck, like silvery writing. You realize that the characters, which are clearly elven, are not any of the alphabets that you learned about. Looking closer, you recognize a few of them, as being Goldogrin. Now why would a hobbit-sized helmet have Goldogrin writing on it?

You stand there for a short time, trying to figure out what it means, in two different senses. First, why does such an item even exist? Second, what does the Goldogorin writing actually say? You cannot decode either meaning, not yet anyway. The key to this is not so clearly labeled or easy to find as the key to the Thain's Armoury.

It is probably time to return to your father's room. For someone who is so bad at hiding keys, he sure is good at keeping secrets.

The first odd thing about the Thain's Treasury is, that it is just down the hall from the privy. The reason why has never been made clear to you, though doubtless it was not the original plan. There is, in fact, a Vault in Great Smials, more than one even, where the Treasury was once kept, but that has not been the case for some time.

This may be in part because one of them was in a central part of Great Smials, which was seldom used when you were a young hobbit-lass, and there were far fewer Took's living here. That was acceptable for items such as your father's mementos from his younger days, but the Treasury was for more everyday access.

It may be simply that this room was the unused one closest to the parts of Great Smials which were still in use, in those days, and so when the treasury was moved to a more convenient room it was put there. Why it was not put in the secondary Vault, nearer your father's office, is not as clear. It may even have been in your grandfather's time. Whatever the reason, it has the peculiar

consequence, that whenever someone goes to the Treasury, they are greeted with a slight scent from the privy down the hall. Perhaps it is a comment on the nature of money; useful, fertile, but unseemly.

Inside the room, there are several locked chests, all of them attached to the floor by iron chains. As there is rarely if ever a reason to remove the chests, the keys to the padlocks of these chains are kept in a secure location. The chests, however, do need to be opened from time to time, and walking all the way back to the office to get the key, if you had forgotten to bring it with you, would be tedious. Keeping the keys to the Thains Treasury chests in the same room as the Treasury would, however, be entirely too casual an attitude towards security for something so important.

The keys are hidden in the privy, down the hall.

Not in any of the worst places one could imagine something might be hidden in a privy, though. There is a brick in the inner wall of the privy, located in a not-very-obvious place where a person using the privy in its intended manner would be unlikely to be facing, which can be removed from the wall. Behind it are half a dozen keys, one for each of the different kinds of lock in the Treasury. You have to wait for one of the younger Tooks, a nephew of yours, to finish using the privy before you can get in and grab the keys, which are of course in the same place they have been for decades, except when your father is using them.

You inspect all of the different chests, wherein there are neatly stacked piles of coins (copper, bronze, tin, silver,

brass, and gold). You flip idly through the ledger books, which detail who has left deposits of their money here, and for how much. Many families in the Shire deposit their savings here, for safekeeping, thinking that nowhere in all the Shire could be more secure than Great Smials. If they only knew. On the other hand, as far as you are aware none of it has ever gone missing, and if it did your father would probably make up the difference out of his own money, so perhaps they are correct after all.


You notice something odd in the column at the far right of each page. After "Name, Amount, Date," there is a column for "Farthing". Thus, this columns says "East, West, East, North, South, West," etc. Most entries are from the Westfarthing, which holds Tuckborough (the village next to Great Smials), Hobbiton, Micheld Delving, and several other towns, but there are some from every one of the four farthings. You do, though, see a few that say "Bree" in this column, which is unusual given that Bree is not part of the Shire. Then, you see one entry that catches your eye.

"Grandmother's". The name, "Ricarda Argine", was one of Grandmother's Hobbits. The same hobbit that your father was roaming through Mathom Holt with, all those years ago. Now why would she be keeping money up in the Shire? Then, you notice that under "Amount", it does not list an amount of money. It says, "pressed flowers".

Looking through the rest of the ledger book, you find them, in the back, between waxed paper sheets. It looks like a large bluebell, but instead of being blue it is a sort of golden color, even dried and pressed. Although far too old and dried for their to be any scent left, the sight of it does

seem to have a clearing affect on your mind, as if the dust of worries and cares are rinsed off of it for a brief time. You know that Ricarda Argine is now deceased; her granddaughter Amaranth sent Mira a letter that said so earlier this winter. Without being certain why, you take the book with the pressed flowers and put it in one of the pockets of your dress, thankful as always that when you make your own dresses, you can insure that they have proper pockets. As you do this, you notice an old note on the waxed papers they are pressed between; they say, "#3" and "#4".

It is time to return to your father's room. If you get there before Bella returns, maybe you can ask Mira how to get Ricarda's flowers to her granddaughter, or whoever should be inheriting them. But not if Bella is already back; she would throw a fit to know that you were in the Treasury.

Hobbits are not, by and large, a religious folk. They are generally very decent, kind, and merciful to those in need, but they are not particularly spiritual. A typical hobbit's greatest enthusiasm is not for a natural wonder like a sunset or a mountaintop, but rather for a basket of warm mushrooms or a fine mug of ale. So, while the learned among them are aware that there are more powerful beings, and somewhere up above them perhaps even The Powerful Being, they do not give the matter much thought. The powerful tend not, so far as they are aware, to give hobbits much notice, and for the most part hobbits prefer it that way.

The Tooks, however, are not altogether typical hobbits. The Thains, in particular, have a great deal more contact with the world outside the Shire than other hobbits. They discuss trade with dwarves from the Blue Mountains, they support the Rangers with foodstuffs in order to help them provide security, and on rare occasion they even have cause to converse with the Elves who wander at will

through the more remote and wooded parts of the Shire. From the elves, in particular, your father has learned a small amount about the peculiar business of spirituality.

The chapel was inspired by this, and it includes fine leaded glass windows which face east. On some mornings, you are not entirely sure how often, your father will rise early and come here to watch the sun rise in the east. It is some manner of meditative experience, and you have never asked him what it was that he thought to accomplish by such behavior.

The room is sparsely furnished, but there are paintings on the walls, that reach up onto the arched ceiling. It appears to show two great trees, one in the west and one in the east. One of them is outlined in silver, and the other in gold, such that they both appear to glow. The entire appearance of the room has the affect of encouraging one to be quiet, and respectful, although respectful to what, exactly, is not clear.

Occasionally, your father would put this chamber to use. For example, he was quite fond of having wedding ceremonies here, for all of his daughters and sons who married. Normally, hobbit weddings are very large affairs, and of course you did all have a big party afterwards. However, the actual wedding ceremony itself would take place here, in this room. The fact that they were always at dawn, while somewhat tiresome, did greatly reduce the number of hobbits who wished to be present for it, such that they could all fit in this relatively small space. Then, a few hours later, a large feast would take place outside with many more guests.

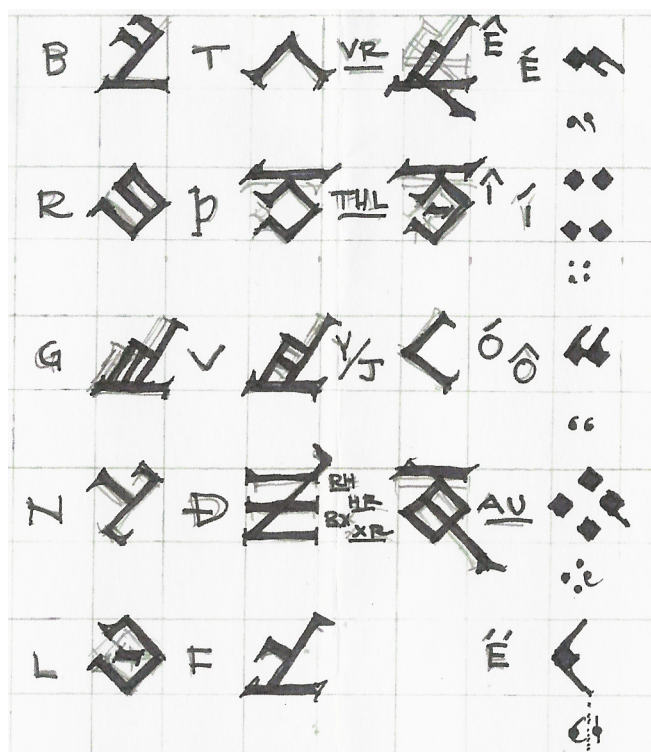
You look about, unsure what to think of this room. On a whim, you sit down in front of the window where your father would sit to watch the sunrise. Looking down, you see that there is a map inscribed into the floor. It appears to be a map of the Misty Mountains. There is also a rectangle inscribed there, somewhat to the west of the map drawn there on the floor. With a bit of a start, you realize that, if you were to extend the map to the west, that rectangle would cover the spot where Great Smials is. The shape of Great Smials is very different than a rectangle, however; you wonder what the purpose of that is. There is also something familiar-looking about the exact size and proportions of the rectangle.

With a second shock, you realize that it is the exact outline of the mapboxes of Arthedain and Cardolan (and presumably also Rhudaur, although you have never seen that as it lies with the Dunadan sorcerer). Since the Cardolan mapbox was being hidden by Ricarda far to the south until recently, it must have been the Arthedain mapbox that your father intended this for.

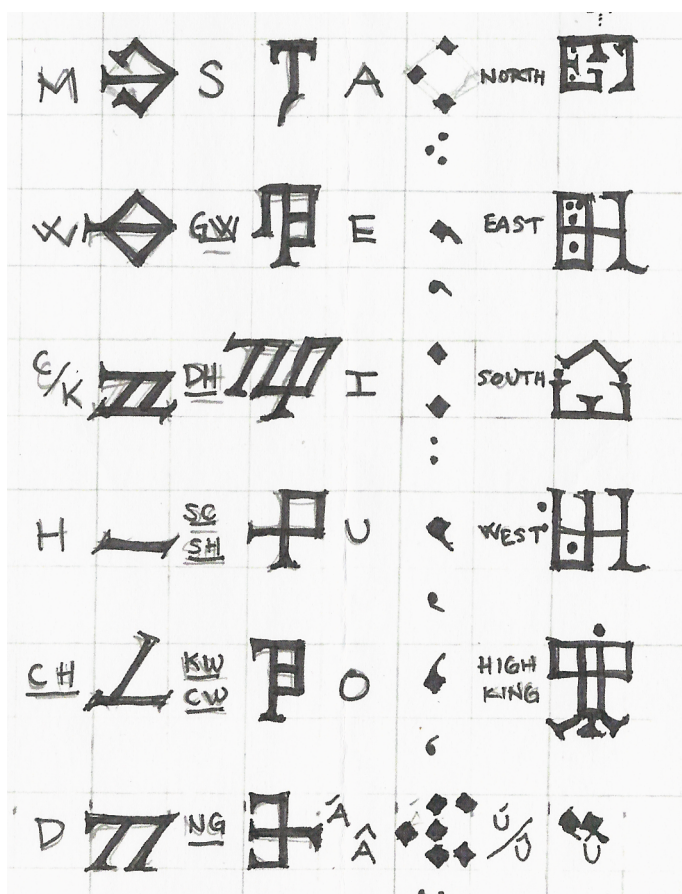
Of course. By placing the lockbox here, in this spot, and looking at which direction the compass rose on it pointed, he could see where the Rhudaur lockbox was (or in which direction, anyway). Since he knew that the Dunadan sorcerer was holding that lockbox, he could tell whether or not the sorcerer was moving from his lair in the northern part of the Misty Mountains. He must have made it part of his morning routine, very early so that he was unlikely ever to be interrupted.

You wonder what it was like for him, the morning when he sat here and saw that after so many years, the needle on the Arthedain lockbox was moving.

The time passes quickly as you sit there wondering. With a start, you realize that it is time to return to your father's chamber, and ask your sister Mira to read some more from his journal. You stand up, turn your back on the map on the floor and the window behind it, and walk quickly away.



Goldogorin script, chiseled (part 1)



Goldogorin script, chiseled (part 2)