

Chapter 12

Disappearance

"So," says Mira, "Papa is sleeping, and Isengrim thinks we should let him sleep in peace. What do you think?"

"About Isengrim?" says Bella, "I think he's self-important and full of himself."

"No no," says Mira, "about Papa. Should we go into his room anyway, and wake him up to ask if he wants us to let him sleep? Or just go somewhere else to read the last of his journal?"

There is a moment of silence. Bella fumes, but then shrugs her shoulders.

"Oh, all right," she says. "We can go into his library then, that has some better chairs anyway."

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I'm nearly caught up to the present, now. I suppose I'll write the rest down, just to have it all laid out in front of me. Sometimes writing things down helps me to organize my thoughts, to see what I cannot see when it's all a whirl inside my head. No help yet, but you never know.

So, we headed up the hill, marching straight towards the plume of smoke that marked where the sorcerer and his

orcs were, and I felt rather like we were heading to our deaths. But then, I recalled that Rinthilios was there with us, and I thought perhaps he would know what to do.

I wonder now why Tyne was coming with us. He seemed scared enough of the orcs that one would have expected him to bolt at the thought of it, but perhaps he also had faith in Rinthilios after what happened in the cave. It may also be that he still felt bad about having tried to betray us to the orcs to save himself, and Ricarda's glower made him stick with us. But honestly, he did not look very frightened, but rather more curious and thoughtful, as if trying to solve a puzzle.

As we got nearer to the top of the hill, we saw that there were about a dozen orcs there, gathered around a fire ring, which they had stoked up to a fair bonfire. We also saw the sorcerer, standing higher up the hill away from the fire. I believe he needs the cold, to keep his withered body from crumbling entirely, and that's why he stayed away from the fire. But seeing him standing there, his eyes glowing faintly red, dressed in tattered remnants of what must at one time have been noble clothes, in the middle of snow and ice, I felt my own heart grow cold.

He gave a signal to the orcs, and I expected them to start barreling down the hillside at us, but they did the opposite. They walked away to the south, each carrying a brightly burning brand with them, with a few backward glances over their shoulders at us as they left. I did not know what to make of that. It should have seemed like good news, since a dozen of them could surely have dealt with us in no time, but perhaps the sorcerer knew something about Rinthilios that I did not. Or, he had other plans.

When we got close to the fire, Rinthilios said to us, "wait here," and without looking back at us he walked slowly up to where the sorcerer stood, stopping a few paces away. I suppose they talked, then, but they were too far away for me to hear any of what was said. I looked around and wondered what to do.

"What are we doing here?" asked Ricarda.

"What are we, what are we?" asked Who.

"We, Miss Ricarda, are the point of contention in the bargaining process," said Tyne.

"I don't think you even know what that means," said Ricarda, her voice dripping with disdain, "but I'm sure I don't."

"Oh, it's not so complicated, if I understand it correctly," said Tyne, ignoring her tone. "Young master Gerontius is correct, it seems, and what the fellow actually wants is this lockbox of his. But, he doesn't believe he can get it from us if Rinthilios doesn't want him to. On the other hand, Rinthilios wants him to take his orcs and leave in peace, and while he might be able to force the issue, even an elf as ancient and powerful as he obviously is cannot force it without a frightful mess. I notice that he is keeping the orcs out of reach of our elven friend. He is likely explaining right now that they have been given orders to burn the forest to the ground if anything happens to their master. So, we are at an impasse, neither able to get what they want by force."

"But what can they be negotiating about, then?" asked Ricarda, curious despite herself to know what Tyne could tell about what was going on. It was pretty clear to me that bargaining was not a thing that Ricarda had much experience with, and what little I knew of her suggested she was not very good at masking her emotions, or her motives, so she probably would not have been great at it. Tyne, on the other hand, seemed quite at ease, and I realized that was why he was not afraid. He knew what was going on, and how it worked, and no matter how grim the situation it is easier to bear up under it when you understand it.

"Well, what can they do? Somehow, they must meet in the middle," said Tyne. "This is one advantage of bargaining about money; no matter how strong the feelings, you at least know what a middle ground between your two positions would be. Pick a number in the middle. When you are not talking about money, it can be a much more difficult process to find a compromise, a middle ground. Let's see now, what would it be in this case?"

"I take it," he said looking at me, "that we do not wish to give him this lockbox that he wants?"

"I think not," I said, "because it gives some powers to the person who has it. I'm not sure what, because I don't know everything there is to know about them. But he has one already, and it's probably what's keeping him alive, and he wants this one, so there must be some reason he wants it. I cannot imagine it would be for good."

"Are we even sure that's what he wants?" asked Ricarda. "When he had control of my mind, he wanted me to convince you to pick some of these flowers."

"Those flowers do seem to be powerful," said Tyne, "based on the little you've told me about them. But it seems rather a coincidence that he arrived here just when Gerontius did, if it was just the flowers he wants. Perhaps he needs them both?"

"I don't think Rinthilios would be willing to give him either one," said Ricarda. "I don't see what there is to negotiate about."

"And yet, neither one would wish to simply fight it out," said Tyne, "they would both lose too much. So, they may not know what solution there could be either. Yet, they must find one. So then, what will the sorcerer offer to Rinthilios?"

"What does it matter?" asked Ricarda. "Rinthilios will never give him anything he wants."

"Are we certain of that, Miss Ricarda?" asked Tyne. "Why is Rinthilios even talking to him, then? He seems mightily attached to this forest, if I am not greatly mistaken. The sorcerer would be a fool to harm it, of course, since if he does he will surely have an implacable and ferocious enemy, with nothing more to live for than to hurt the ones who burned his forest down. But, perhaps the sorcerer can convince Rinthilios that he is a fool, and that he will unleash his orcs on it, and they will do grievous damage to it before Rinthilios can stop them. Especially since he sent them on their way towards the

forest as soon as he knew Rinthilios had seen them, but not until then."

Ricarda frowned even more than she had been before.

"It seems a strange kind of bargaining," she said, "to try to convince the other fellow that you're a fool. Normally you would want to put yourself out as smarter than the other fellow, wouldn't you?"

"Oh no, Miss Ricarda," said Tyne, "that is rarely a good tactic. If you come across as clever, the other side is on their guard. Moreover, they may imagine you to be up to trickery even when you are not. But in this case, it is important that the other side not believe you to be too reasonable, too willing to do what's required to avoid a catastrophe that does no one any good. If you give that impression, then the other side can be as demanding as they want, right up to the point of mutual catastrophe, just barely short of it, secure in the knowledge that YOU will do what is required to avoid it, because you think yourself to be the smart one. Better to let on that you may be too headstrong, emotional, or just plain slow to see what might happen, so they will not risk it."

"I don't understand how that works," said Ricarda.

"There you go, Miss Ricarda, you're getting the hang of it!" said Tyne, in such a friendly and encouraging voice that I could honestly not tell if he was being sarcastic.

"Will you just tell me?!" said Ricarda, a little too loud, causing both the sorcerer and Rinthilios to look over in her direction briefly. She looked somewhat abashed, and in a

softer voice repeated, "can you just tell me what you mean?"

"If the sorcerer there starts to set fire to the forest, then Rinthilios will have to leave us and fly at them to stop it," said Tyne. "After he is done with the orcs, he will come back to deal with the sorcerer, but by then we might all be dead, and the lockbox taken. On the other hand, if Rinthilios attacks the sorcerer, he will likely win, but the orcs will burn half the forest down before he can finish with the sorcerer and then catch them all. Notice that the brands they took with them burn rather brighter than normal wood fires. I expect they have some sorcerous fuel with them, that will allow them to do a great deal of damage in a small amount of time. So, neither one can actually attack, without losing their life, or the life of something they care greatly about."

"You might think that makes it impossible to make a credible threat. So it may. Unless you can convince the other fellow you're insane, or too emotional, or desperate, and you're willing to do a foolish thing. Then, your threat becomes convincing. So you see, Miss Ricarda, it is often an important part of negotiation to not be too fond of showing off how smart you are. It is not very clever to try to appear clever, when you're bargaining with an enemy."

"My head hurts," said Ricarda, with her face in her hands, "I am starting to think I may not be clever enough for bargaining. Or maybe this means I would be great at it, I don't know any more."

We stood there for a little while then, in silence. The longer we waited, the more I realized that I was really the

problem. I had come to Mathom Holt to see if there was a safe place here to store the Cardolan lockbox, but all it did was bring trouble. There was no way Rinthilios was going to give up the forest, and there was no way that the sorcerer was going to give up his pursuit of the lockbox so long as he thought he could get it. So, they were locked in a standoff, and the reason was, that I was here. In fact, Tyne and Ricarda would also probably be happily picking old elvish coins out of the streambed or back in Tharbad selling them now, if I had not brought the sorcerer and his pack of orcs into their vicinity.

I looked around, wondering if I could run away fast enough that I could lose the sorcerer and his minions. I didn't see any way out that would get me out of sight fast enough. I wished fervently that Gandalf and Arathorn would come back, right now, but they were nowhere to be seen, and if that was a different group of orcs they were following, they could be long away from here right now. In fact, I realized, there was a good chance that their whole purpose was to lure Gandalf and Arathorn away from me, since the sorcerer probably knew they would pursue them, and also that there was no way I could keep up, so they would leave me with Ricarda in the forest. Which would have been safe, if it weren't for the fact that Ricarda was under the sorcerer's control. Even if it wasn't a trick by the sorcerer, if I was an orc with a Ranger and a Wizard chasing me, I would run long and fast. So, no Ranger and Wizard coming to the rescue any time soon, then.

So I sat down on a log by the fire ring, with the bonfire between me and the sorcerer, and thought. Ricarda and Hildigard eventually came to sit next to me; Tyne stood

where he was, watching the discussion between Rinthilios and the sorcerer I suppose.

"If I were a bird like you, Who, I would fly away," I said.

"You, away, you, away," said Who.

"Well, you're not a bird, you're a hobbit," said Ricarda.
"So here we sit."

Yes, I thought, here we sit. Because I am a hobbit, not a bird. I'm a hobbit. Hmmm...

"Ricarda," I asked, "where do your people live?"

"I'm sorry, Gerontius, nothing personal, but I'm not allowed..."

"No no, I didn't mean that," I said, "not where specifically. I mean, do you live in houses, aboveground? Or on boats? Or travel around like nomads and live in tents? Or is that a secret also?"

"Well no, I suppose I could tell you that," said Ricarda.
"We move around during the year, part of the year in treehouses, and part of the year in underground smials."

"Oh. Which do you like better?" I asked.

"The underground ones," said Ricarda. "It's so much cozier. I don't know, the treehouses are nice enough I suppose, but I just feel better in the underground smial."

"Yeah, it's like that with Shire Hobbits, too," I said.

"Some of us live in aboveground houses, but we all prefer underground smials, if we can. I suppose it's like Who likes flying, when it would make me feel queasy to be up that high, even if I had wings. We're meant for burrowing."

"It's safer," said Ricarda. "I mean, that's why even the elves built those tunnels we were in earlier."

Those tunnels.

I looked through the fire, which was starting to die down just a little, and up towards the sorcerer and Rinthilios at the peak of the hill. I thought, perhaps, that I had seen something on that hillside earlier, and now I had an idea what it might be.

I got up, and started walking towards the two of them.

"Where are you going?" asked Ricarda. I didn't answer.

I had gotten about halfway from the fire-ring to the peak, when the sorcerer's gaze shifted direction just slightly, so I suppose he had noticed me. Rinthilios did not look back, perhaps because he did not wish to turn his back on the sorcerer and invite a sneak attack. But, he must have guessed it was me that was approaching.

"Gerontius, don't come any closer," he said when I had gotten about twenty paces away.

"I just wanted to say," I said, "that I have it," and here I brought out the Cardolan lockbox and showed it to him, "but you cannot have it. So you might as well leave now."

There was an exasperated silence from both of them.

"Thank-you, Gerontius, for sharing that, you can go back now," said Rinthilios, still not taking his eyes off the sorcerer. I turned and walked back, now rather excited but trying not to show it, because on the way there I had been able to take a closer look at something partway up the hill.

"What was that about?" asked Ricarda when I got back to the fire ring, and Tyne looked like he was wondering the same.

"There's a tunnel entrance on the side of the hill," I hissed excitedly. "It's not a door, it looks like the tunnel under there must have collapsed. It's partially hidden by the snow, but when I walked by it I could see for certain. The opening is big enough for us to fit in there. We could escape through the tunnels, and then Rinthilios won't have to worry about protecting us. Plus, the Cardolan lockbox would be out of his reach."

Ricarda looked around me, trying to see the entrance I was talking about, but Tyne quickly put a hand on her shoulder, which caused her to look at him instead.

"Let's not be too obvious about looking at it," said Tyne. "Gerontius here made sure to have an excuse for walking up in that direction, for just this reason. They thought he was walking up to talk to them, so they didn't imagine him to be looking at something on the way. The sorcerer

probably hasn't seen that hole in the ground, or didn't recognize it for what it was. It's not very large; too small for a full-sized man to crawl through anyway."

"But won't he notice if he sees Gerontius walking up to it, and then disappear?" said Ricarda. "He'll call his orcs back at once, won't he?"

"Maybe we can run fast enough that by the time he realizes it, we'll be long gone," I said. Ricarda looked dubious.

"I can think of another way," said Tyne. Ricarda looked even more dubious.

"What is that?" I asked.

"The three of us could walk up as far as that spot, and then stop and have a conversation. I'll be with my back to you, and I'm bigger, so you'll be blocked from view. You slip into the hole, and I will keep up the conversation for as long as I can. By the time he figures out that it's just me there talking, you could be well on your way. I'm probably too big to slip through a hobbit-sized hole, anyway."

"You can't keep up a conversation on your own for very long, though, can you?" I asked.

"Yes he can," answered Ricarda immediately. "He's very good at that, actually. Can Hildigard get through this hole?"

"I think so," I said. "If she squeezes. I'll go first, and we can help her."

"Good," said Ricarda, "because if she sees you go and then she's not able to follow, she may whine and attract attention."

"I wish I had a bigger cloak still," said Tyne. "It would allow me to block the view of you better. But it was taken from me when I was prisoner."

"I've got a blanket in my pack," I said, and dug it out. "If you wrap it around your shoulders and let it hang down to the ground, it will work almost as well."

"Now it will be important that we not move into our final position too quickly," said Tyne. "He has to see us talking there for a few minutes, before he will stop paying much attention to us. Fortunately, he needs to keep a pretty sharp eye on Rinthilios to prevent a surprise attack, so it should not take very long before he stops taking any notice of us again. But if I moved into position to block any view of you the moment we get to that spot, it will be too obvious. So we'll just chat for a while, and then I'll shift position eventually to block his view of you."

"I am no good at acting," said Ricarda. "I wonder if I should just stay here."

"No, it would be safer if you came with me," I said. "That way Rinthilios doesn't have to worry about defending you in the middle of combat, if it comes to that."

There was a pause, as we all thought more about the possibility of the sorcerer calling his orcs back to attack once he realized we had gone. What would Tyne do?

"It's all right," said Tyne, reading our thoughts. "I can talk the orcs out of doing anything hasty, I think. I've done it before. I am good at looking harmless and stalling for time. Anyway, they will be much more concerned with Rinthilios than with me. But, I certainly won't be able to keep anyone from following you into the tunnels, so keep moving."

"If I'm right, they won't want to enter the tunnels," I said. "They aren't safe to be in, if Rinthilios doesn't want you there. All right, let's go then."

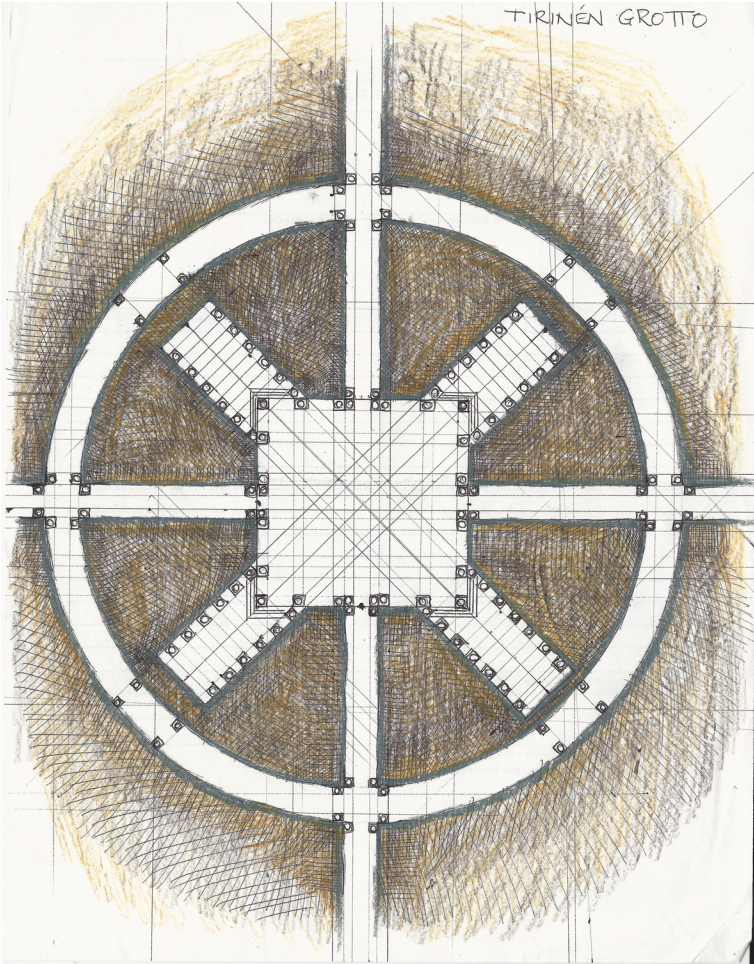
It more or less all worked as planned. Tyne was, as it turns out, very good at holding a conversation, at length, without anyone else having to say much. At first we would occasionally chip in with a word or two, but then stopped, and when we got near to the hole I stopped walking. Tyne nearly put his foot into it, but fortunately did not, and he walked just past it, on the uphill side. At first he was facing northwards, and we were visible to the sorcerer. I squatted down and put my head on my hand, and tried to look bored, which despite how nervous I felt, was actually surprisingly easy with Tyne talking on and on about the various wares for sale back in Tharbad. Ricarda and Hildigard came and sat down beside me, with the three of us in a row so that it was not too hard for Tyne to block the view of all of us. After a while Tyne gradually shifted around to face westward, and put his hands on his

hips with his arms akimbo, so that the blanket I had loaned him was spread wide, blocking as much of the sorcerer's view of us as possible. He was still talking on and on, and sounding very interested in what he was saying.

I dived headfirst into the hole, and was partway through it before I realized that, while I knew there was a hole into the tunnels, I didn't know that there wasn't another collapsed section further on, and we would be trapped. Well, I thought, too late now. So, I clambered over a pile of rubble and rock, and eventually made my way down to a smooth stone floor. I could see nearly nothing, but there was no time to stop and light a candle. Then, I realized that I still had the flowers in my hair that Ricarda had put there, and so did she, so there was a very faint golden glow that I could see by once my eyes adjusted. Ricarda and Hildigard scrambled down after me, and then the three of us began to run quietly along the tunnel, heading east, right under the spot where Rinthilios and the sorcerer were having their faceoff. We still dimly heard Tyne's voice behind us, talking away as if we were still there.

cover it with snow to keep
would be better if he were
Rhudaur lockbox, which he
centuries. The two of you
written on it, what the
hands to pull out the
picking it up again, and
at you, and smiles. "Is it
two of you shuffle slowly
for the moment at least, he
slowly over in that
thinking it would be, but
Tassel," says your father,
one called Mira? But I like
thing." Saying so, the crow
cure what's wrong with him.
in a hurry, or there was
if you know him." Your
happy to give you another
flies off. "You know this
years. I'll tell you the
the object which he brought
realize that the message in
first."

it fresh as long as
not waiting just outside,
held in his left hand. That
look inside. There is an
keepers of the palantir, the
message which was meant for
looking at the compass on
dinnertime yet? I feel like
back towards the rest of the
is defeated and cast out,
direction. You go over to
then he did exactly what you
"I see you have met my
this one too. You should
begins eating the roll, with
Although good food does
something he didn't like
father and you look at each
roll, if you could go get
crow's name?" you
story some day." Tassel the
back. "Well I'll be
the Arthedain lockbox, from



We ran for an hour or so, along the tunnels and then through a grotto, eventually coming upon the largest underground grotto we had seen. It was dark, with only the slight glow from the flowers to see by, and there were the dim shapes of statues and carvings that loomed above us. Who and Hildigard stayed very close to us, and we stayed close to each other, and eventually found stairs up.

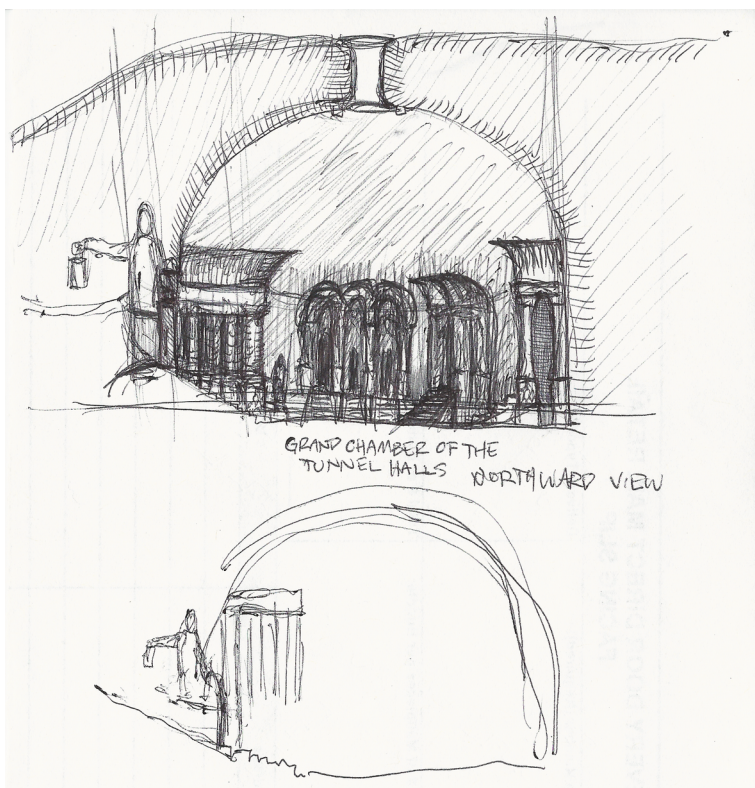
When we emerged into the light of day again, I realized we had just exited from that space between the two weathered statues, that I saw from the other side when I was walking with Gandalf and Arathorn. How long had it been since then? I had only slept once, but it seemed ages ago.

"How far do we need to go, do you suppose?" asked Ricarda.

"Not far, I think," I said. "Once the sorcerer realizes we're gone, he will probably take his orcs and leave."

We walked south through the forest. I was just starting to wonder how far we should go, since I wasn't sure we should go all the way to the edge in case the sorcerer was waiting there, when we saw Gandalf walking the other way, towards us.

"Gandalf!" I cried out, happier than I had been in a couple days.



"Gerontius, you were never one who was able to follow instructions! I told you to escort Miss Ricarda here to the forest, and wait for us! Now Rinthilios has told us that you have run rings around every hill and holt in his realm, dancing with orcs and dealing with sorcerers!"

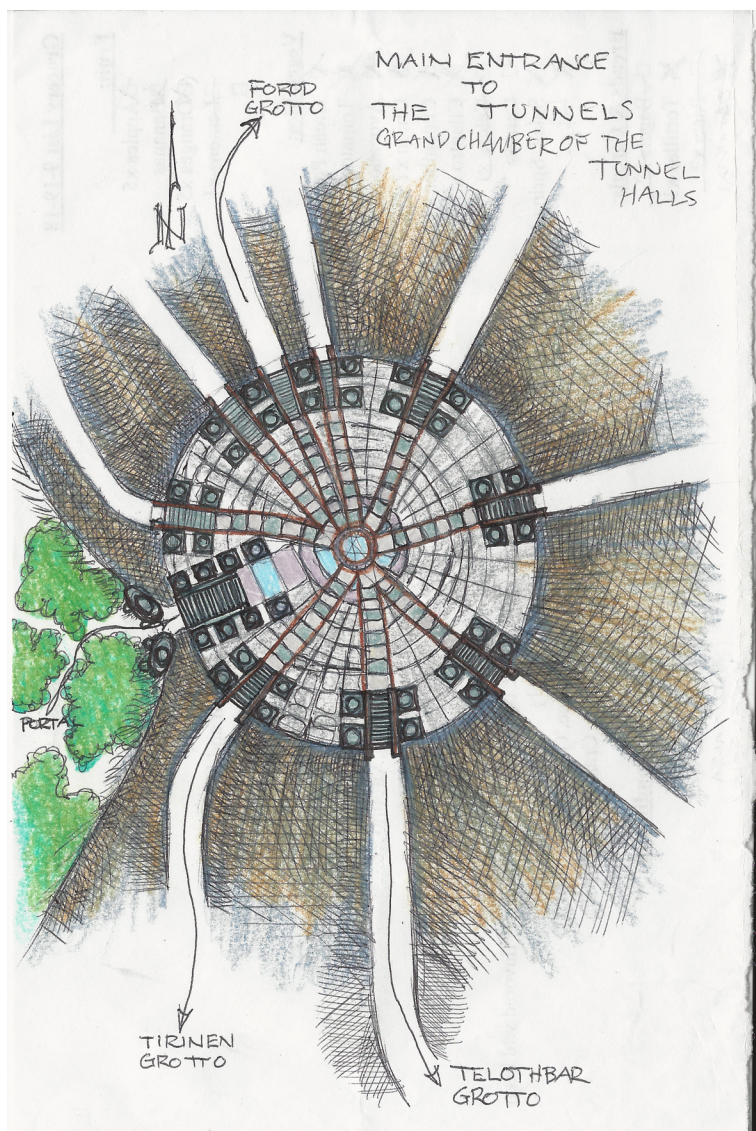
"Well it was not quite like that," I said, "but I can say I am very glad to see you again. Where is Arathorn?"

"With Rinthilios, making sure that the sorcerer and all of his orcs have truly departed," said Gandalf. "But I came this way to find the rest of you. Tyne is waiting at the south end of the forest. You can travel with us back towards Tharbad, Ricarda."

And so we are; we're most of the way there now, and may arrive tomorrow. It seemed for a time that we had escaped. I was back with Gandalf, and Arathorn, headed south on the road to Tharbad. Rinthilios stayed in his beloved forest, of course, but he is able to take care of himself well enough, and in any case the sorcerer would have no interest in staying around there once he could tell that the lockbox was gone. Since his lockbox points always towards the Cardolan lockbox, he would know that it was out of his reach again.

And that, really, was when I realized my problem.

I had, of course, succeeded in leaving the sorcerer behind. This is a colder winter than usual, but Mathom Holt is about as far south as the sorcerer could dare to go even in this winter. If he went any further south, he would risk a sudden warm spell, and he seems to have a need for freezing temperatures, to keep his half-dead body from



falling apart. So, the plan was, I could leave the Cardolan lockbox somewhere south, and it would be out of his reach, and everything would be fine.

But, that isn't going to be enough. Because, sooner or later, there will be an even colder winter, and he will be able to go further south. Someday, we might have another Long Winter, and even Tharbad or points further south would be freezing, and he would be able to go there and get it. I could ask the Lamplighter to take it back, I suppose, or ask Rinthilios to protect it. But really, they both have to stay where they are, they have obligations that keep them from just leaving if the sorcerer is headed their way.

I could just take it somewhere south of Tharbad and throw it away, but someone else might find it. It needs to be hidden well, but since it cannot be hidden well enough to keep the sorcerer from knowing where it is, there has to be someone nearby who can get it and leave with it if they need to. With the Arthedain lockbox, I could know when he starts to move, and I could take both lockboxes and head south whenever that happens (faster than I did this time, I suppose). But Great Smials is too far north, I would have to leave every third or fourth winter, to stay out of his reach. Or I could just move somewhere far south and stay there, but I don't want to leave the Shire, not forever.

Really, what I need is for me to stay in the Shire, with the Arthedain lockbox, so that I can see the compass move as soon as the sorcerer leaves his lair up in the northern mountains. But I need the Cardolan lockbox to be hidden

somewhere south, with someone who I can trust, but who is able to leave their home if they need to.

Maybe Ricarda was right. Maybe it's safer to just hide where your people even live.

Oh. Oh I see. Well I guess it's time to wake Ricarda up anyway.

* * * * *

"What?" says Mira, with a mix of surprise and annoyance. "That's it? That's not an ending!"

"He was writing it for himself," says Bella, "to help think through it. Once he figured out what he needed to do, he didn't need to write it down, just do it."

"Do what?" asked Mira, still sounding annoyed.

"Well as soon as he wakes up, we could ask him," says Bella.

Just then, Isengrim comes into the library hurriedly, frowning.

"Ladies," he says, "have you seen father? He's not in his room, and I'm not sure where he's gone."

You all three jump up, alarmed, and your sisters rush off to help Isengrim with the search.

Do you:

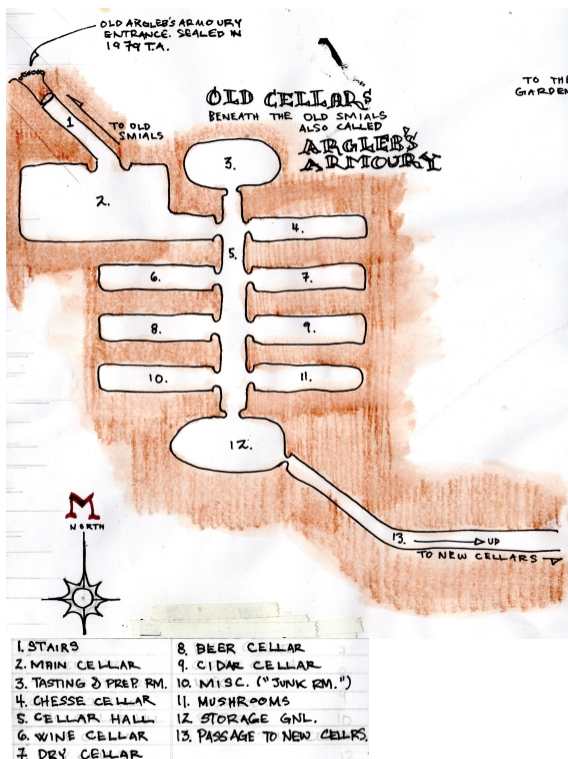
1) go with your sisters to get all of the Took's searching Great Smials from top to bottom? Page 26

2) go back to your father's room to look for clues? Page 27

Page 27

3) look outside to see if there are tracks in the snow that look like his? Page 28

4) stay in the library, and read through his journal again to look for clues? Page 29



You and your sisters spread out through Great Smials, asking everyone if they have seen your father, and recruiting them to search as well. Soon, Great Smials resembles an anthill that has been poked with a stick, and all of its inhabitants sent into frenzied circles. After repeating the same conversation dozens of times, asking for help, you are interrupted by a tearful Isengar. He brings awful news.

Your father was found in the snow outside, north and west of Great Smials, with a sword wound in his chest, dead. The Cardolan lockbox, which Mira left in the library when you all ran out of it to search for Gerontius, is gone. Looking on the compass rose on the top of the Arthedain lockbox, which you hold, you see that whoever holds the Rhudaur lockbox is moving north.

This winter is already tragic. It will get worse.

While the rest of the Took's run quickly from room to room, spreading the alarm and recruiting more hobbits to search, you return to your father's chamber and look for any sign of what could have happened. You see that there is no sign of a struggle, or any forced entry.

You are still searching the room meticulously, trying to find some clue as to what could have happened, when Isengrim comes to you, shaken and grief-stricken, and tells you the awful news. Your father was found in the snow outside, north and west of Great Smials, with a sword wound in his chest, dead. Looking on the compass rose on the top of the Arthedain lockbox, which you hold, you see that whoever holds the Rhudaur lockbox is moving north. When you talk to Mira, she reveals that the Cardolan lockbox is now gone. She left it unattended in the library where the three of you were sitting, when you all heard that your father was missing and ran out to look for him. So, now the sorcerer has two of the lockboxes.

This winter is already tragic. It will get worse.

While the rest of the Took's are searching inside Great Smials, you go outside into the bitter cold and snow, and look for tracks. You find them near the northwest corner of Great Smials. You follow them into the dark and swirling snow, and eventually you find your father.

On the ground, face down in the snow. Standing over him, is the sorcerer, still holding the sword that was used to kill him. He smiles at you.

"How convenient of you to bring me the Arthedain lockbox," he says. "Now I have all three."

You turn, and try to run, but you are not fast enough.

Bella, Mira, and Isengrim run out of the library, looking for your father and recruiting others to help in the search. You stay, and look through your father's journal again, trying to find if there are any clues you could have overlooked. You are startled to look up, and see your father standing in front of you. He is holding the Cardolan lockbox, which Mira left here.

"We should take these to a safer place," he says, and quickly grabs the Arthedain lockbox from the table next to you, were you put it while you were reading. He turns and walks out.

You follow, trying to find an opportunity to get the lockboxes back from him.

"Papa," you say, "why don't you give me those? I can carry them for you to wherever we're going."

"No need," he says, in an oddly flat and emotionless voice, "but you can come with me if you would like."

He heads downstairs, to the cellar.

"Shouldn't we take these to your vault, then, if we want them to be safe?" you ask. "Back by the library? I don't think the cellar is the safest place to keep them."

"The vault is too obvious a place to hide them," he says, "I know a better place."

"Did you know," he continues, "that before this place was called Great Smials, before it was called The Smials, before any hobbits lived in it, there was a small armoury

here? It was called Argeleb's Armoury. There was but one entrance. I remember it well."

"How could you remember it?" you ask. "That was all long before you were born. Even you aren't that old, Papa."

You are pulled up short in your conversation when you realize that the hallway he has led you to is extremely cold, icy even. You catch a glimpse of red faintly glowing eyes in the darkness, coming towards you, but you are too surprised to even have a chance to scream.

