

The Hobbit:
Into the Fire
(from: Chapter 5)

(-.-) Bilbo still wandered on, out of the little high valley, over its edge, and down the slopes beyond; but all the while a very uncomfortable thought was growing inside him. He wondered whether he ought not, now he had the magic ring, to go back into the horrible, horrible, tunnels and look for his friends. He had just made up his mind that it was his duty, that he must turn back—and very miserable he felt about it—when he heard voices.

(0.00) He crept still nearer, and suddenly he saw peering between two big boulders a head with a red hood on: it was Balin doing look-out. He could have clapped and shouted for joy, but he did not. He had still got the ring on, for fear of meeting something unexpected and unpleasant, and he saw that Balin was looking straight at him without noticing him.

(0.40) “I will give them all a surprise,” he thought, as he crawled into the bushes at the edge of the dell.

(0.15) Gandalf was arguing with the dwarves. They were discussing all that had happened to them in the tunnels, and wondering and debating what they were to do now. The dwarves were grumbling, and Gandalf was saying that they could not possibly go on with their journey leaving Mr. Baggins in the hands of the goblins, without trying to find out if he was alive or dead, and without trying to rescue him.

(-.-) “After all he is my friend,” said the wizard, “and not a bad little chap. I feel responsible for him. I wish to goodness you had not lost him.”

(-.-) The dwarves wanted to know why he had ever been brought at all, why he could not stick to his friends and come along with them, and why the wizard had not chosen someone with more sense. “He has been more trouble than use so far,” said one. “If we have got to go back now into those abominable tunnels to look for him, then drat him, I say.”

(-.-) Gandalf answered angrily: “I brought him, and I don’t bring things that are of no use. Either you help me to look for him, or I go and leave you here to get out of the mess as best you can yourselves. If we can only find him again, you will

thank me before all is over. Whatever did you want to go and drop him for, Dori?”

(-.-) “You would have dropped him,” said Dori, “if a goblin had suddenly grabbed your legs from behind in the dark, tripped up your feet, and kicked you in the back!”

(-.-) “Then why didn’t you pick him up again?”

(-.-) “Good heavens! Can you ask! Goblins fighting and biting in the dark, everybody falling over bodies and hitting one another! And here we are—without the burglar.”

(1.00) “And here’s the burglar!” said Bilbo stepping down into the middle of them, and slipping off the ring.

(1.07) Bless me, how they jumped! Then they shouted with surprise and delight. Gandalf was as astonished as any of them, but probably more pleased than all the others. He called to Balin and told him what he thought of a look-out man who let people walk right into them like that without warning. It is a fact that Bilbo’s reputation went up a very great deal with the dwarves after this. If they had still doubted that he was really a first-class burglar, in spite of Gandalf’s words, they doubted no longer. Balin was the most puzzled of all; but everyone said it was a very clever bit of work. Indeed Bilbo was so pleased with their praise that he just chuckled inside and said nothing whatever about the ring; and when they asked him how he did it, he said: “Oh, just crept along, you know—very carefully and quietly.”

(-.-) “Well, it is the first time that even a mouse has crept along carefully and quietly under my very nose and not been spotted,” said Balin, “and I take off my hood to you.” Which he did. “Balin at your service,” said he.

(-.-) “Your servant, Mr. Baggins,” said Bilbo.

(-.-) Then they wanted to know all about his adventures after they had lost him, and he sat down and told them everything—except about the finding of the ring (“not just now” he thought). They were particularly interested in the riddle competition, and shuddered most appreciatively at his description of Gollum.

(-.-) “What about the guards?” they asked. “Weren’t there any?”

(-- --) “O yes! Lots of them; but I dodged them. I got stuck in the door, which was only open a crack, and I lost lots of buttons,” he said sadly looking at his torn clothes. “But I squeezed through all right—and here I am.”

(-- --) The dwarves looked at him with quite a new respect, when he talked about dodging guards, jumping over Gollum, and squeezing through, as if it was not very difficult or very alarming.

(1.29) “What did I tell you?” said Gandalf laughing. “Mr. Baggins has more about him than you guess.” He gave Bilbo a queer look from under his bushy eyebrows, as he said this, and the hobbit wondered if he guessed at the part of his tale that he had left out.

(-- --) “I am dreadfully hungry,” groaned Bilbo, who was suddenly aware that he had not had a meal since the night before the night before last. Just think of that for a hobbit! His stomach felt all empty and loose and his legs all wobbly, now that the excitement was over.

(-- --) “Can’t help it,” said Gandalf, “unless you like to go back and ask the goblins nicely to let you have your pony back and your luggage.”

(-- --) “No thank you!” said Bilbo.

(-- --) “Very well then, we must just tighten our belts and trudge on—or we shall be made into supper, and that will be much worse than having none ourselves.”

(-- --) After what seemed ages further, they came suddenly to an opening where no trees grew. The moon was up and was shining into the clearing. Somehow it struck all of them as not at all a nice place, although there was nothing wrong to see.

(2.44) All of a sudden they heard a howl away downhill, a long shuddering howl. It was answered by another away to the right and a good deal nearer to them; then by another not far away to the left. It was wolves howling at the moon, wolves gathering together!

(-- --) There were no wolves living near Mr. Baggins’ hole at home, but he knew that noise. He had had it described to him often enough in tales. One of his elder cousins (on the Took side), who had been a great traveller, used to imitate it to frighten him. To hear it out in the forest under the moon was too much for Bilbo.

(2.46) “What shall we do, what shall we do!” he cried. “Escaping goblins to be caught by wolves!” he said, and it became a proverb, though we now say “out of the frying-pan into the fire” in the same sort of uncomfortable situations.

(3.05) “Up the trees quick!” cried Gandalf; and they ran to the trees at the edge of the glade, hunting for those that had branches fairly low, or were slender enough to swarm up. They found them as quick as ever they could. Up they went as high as ever they could trust the branches. You would have laughed (from a safe distance), if you had seen the dwarves sitting up in the trees with their beards dangling down.

(3.15) Fili and Kili were at the top of a tall larch like an enormous Christmas tree. Dori, Nori, Ori, Oin, and Gloin were more comfortable in a huge pine with regular branches sticking out at intervals like the spokes of a wheel. Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, and Thorin were in another. Dwalin and Balin had swarmed up a tall slender fir with few branches and were trying to find a place to sit in the greenery of the topmost boughs.

(3.13) Gandalf, who was a good deal taller than the others, had found a tree into which they could not climb, a large pine standing at the very edge of the glade. He was quite hidden in its boughs, but you could see his eyes gleaming in the moon as he peeped out.

(3.26) And Bilbo? He could not get into any tree, and was scuttling about from trunk to trunk, like a rabbit that has lost its hole and has a dog after it.

(-- --) “You’ve left the burglar behind again!” said Nori to Dori looking down.

(-- --) “I can’t be always carrying burglars on my back,” said Dori, “down tunnels and up trees! What do you think I am? A porter?”

(-- --) “He’ll be eaten if we don’t do something,” said Thorin, for there were howls all round them now, getting nearer and nearer. “Dori!” he called, for Dori was lowest down in the easiest tree, “be quick, and give Mr. Baggins a hand up!”

(-- --) Dori was really a decent fellow in spite of his grumbling. Poor Bilbo could not reach his hand even when he climbed down to the bottom branch and hung his arm down as far as ever he could. So Dori actually climbed out of the tree and let Bilbo scramble up and stand on his back.

(-- --) Just at that moment the wolves trotted howling into the clearing. All of a sudden there were hundreds of eyes looking at them. Still Dori did not let Bilbo

down. He waited till he had clambered off his shoulders into the branches, and then he jumped for the branches himself. Only just in time! A wolf snapped at his cloak as he swung up, and nearly got him. In a minute there was a whole pack of them yelping all-round the tree and leaping up at the trunk, with eyes blazing and tongues hanging out.

(3.35) But even the wild Wargs (for so the evil wolves over the Edge of the Wild were named) cannot climb trees. For a time they were safe. Luckily it was warm and not windy. Trees are not very comfortable to sit in for long at any time; but in the cold and the wind, with wolves all round below waiting for you, they can be perfectly miserable places.

(3.43) Now you can understand why Gandalf, listening to their growling and yelping, began to be dreadfully afraid, wizard though he was, and to feel that they were in a very bad place, and had not yet escaped at all. All the same he was not going to let them have it all their own way, though he could not do very much stuck up in a tall tree with wolves all round on the ground below. He gathered the huge pine-cones from the branches of the tree. Then he set one alight with bright blue fire, and threw it whizzing down among the circle of the wolves. It struck one on the back, and immediately his shaggy coat caught fire, and he was leaping to and fro yelping horribly. Then another came and another, one in blue flames, one in red, another in green. They burst on the ground in the middle of the circle and went off in coloured sparks and smoke. A specially large one hit the chief wolf on the nose, and he leaped in the air ten feet, and then rushed round and round the circle biting and snapping even at the other wolves in his anger and fright.

(4.10) The dwarves and Bilbo shouted and cheered. The rage of the wolves was terrible to see, and the commotion they made filled all the forest. Wolves are afraid of fire at all times, but this was a most horrible and uncanny fire. If a spark got in their coats it stuck and burned into them, and unless they rolled over quick they were soon all in flames.

(--.) "What is all this uproar in the forest tonight?" said the Lord of the Eagles. He was sitting, black in the moonlight, on the top of a lonely pinnacle of rock at the eastern edge of the mountains. "I hear wolves' voices! Are the goblins at mischief in the woods?"

(--.) He swept up into the air, and immediately two of his guards from the rocks at either hand leaped up to follow him. They circled up in the sky and looked

down upon the ring of the Wargs, a tiny spot far far below. But eagles have keen eyes and can see small things at a great distance. The Lord of the Eagles of the Misty Mountains had eyes that could look at the sun unblinking, and could see a rabbit moving on the ground a mile below even in the moonlight. So though he could not see the people in the trees, he could make out the commotion among the wolves and see the tiny flashes of fire, and hear the howling and yelping come up faint from far beneath him. Also he could see the glint of the moon on goblin spears and helmets, as long lines of the wicked folk crept down the hillsides from their gate and wound into the wood.

(--.) The Lord of the Eagles was filled with curiosity to know what was afoot; so he summoned many other eagles to him, and they flew away from the mountains, and slowly circling ever round and round they came down, down, down towards the ring of the wolves and the meeting-place of the goblins.

(--.) A very good thing too! Dreadful things had been going on down there. The wolves that had caught fire and fled into the forest had set it alight in several places. It was high summer, and on this eastern side of the mountains there had been little rain for some time. All round the clearing of the Wargs, fire was leaping. But the wolf-guards did not leave the trees. Maddened and angry they were leaping and howling round the trunks.

(--.) Then suddenly goblins came running up yelling. They thought a battle with the woodmen was going on; but they soon learned what had really happened.

(--.) Some of them actually sat down and laughed. Others waved their spears and clashed the shafts against their shields. Goblins are not afraid of fire, and they soon had a plan which seemed to them most amusing.

(--.) Some got all the wolves together in a pack. Some stacked fern and brushwood round the tree-trunks. Others rushed round and stamped and beat, and beat and stamped, until nearly all the flames were put out—but they did not put out the fire nearest to the trees where the dwarves were. That fire they fed with leaves and dead branches and bracken. Soon they had a ring of smoke and flame all-round the dwarves, a ring which they kept from spreading outwards; but it closed slowly in, till the running fire was licking the fuel piled under the trees. Smoke was in Bilbo's eyes, he could feel the heat of the flames; and he could see the goblins dancing round and round in a circle like people round a midsummer bonfire. Outside the ring of dancing warriors with spears and axes, the wolves stood at a respectful distance, watching and waiting.

(4.13) Suddenly, the flames were under Gandalf's tree. In a moment, it spread to the others. The bark caught fire, the lower branches cracked.

(--.) Then Gandalf climbed to the top of his tree. The sudden splendour flashed from his wand like lightning, as he got ready to spring down from on high right among the spears of the goblins. That would have been the end of him, though he would probably have killed many of them as he came hurtling down like a thunderbolt. But he never leaped.

(4.21) Just at that moment the Lord of the Eagles swept down from above, seized him in his talons, and was gone.

(4.28) There was a howl of anger and surprise from the goblins. Loud cried the Lord of the Eagles, to whom Gandalf had now spoken. Back swept the great birds that were with him, and down they came like huge black shadows. The wolves yammered and gnashed their teeth; the goblins yelled and stamped with rage, and flung their heavy spears in the air in vain. Over them swooped the eagles; the dark rush of their beating wings sknocked them to the floor or drove them far away; their talons tore at goblin faces. Other birds flew to the tree-tops and seized the dwarves, who were scrambling up now as far as they could.

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

(--.) Now far below the goblins and the wolves were scattering far and wide in the woods. A few eagles were still circling and sweeping above the battleground.

(--.) The flames about the trees sprang suddenly up above the highest branches. They went up in crackling fire. There was a sudden flurry of sparks and smoke. Bilbo had escaped only just in time!