

The Hobbit:
The Quest
(from: Chapter 1)

You asked me to find the fourteenth man for your expedition, and I chose Mr. Baggins. Just let any one say I chose the wrong man or the wrong house, and you can stop at thirteen and have all the bad luck you like, or go back to digging coal.”

He scowled so angrily at Gloin that the dwarf huddled back in his chair; and when Bilbo tried to open his mouth to ask a question, he turned and frowned at him and stuck out his bushy eyebrows, till Bilbo shut his mouth tight.

“That’s right,” said Gandalf. “Let’s have no more argument. I have chosen Mr. Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself. You may (possibly) all live to thank me yet. Now Bilbo, my boy, fetch the lamp, and let’s have a little light on this!”

On the table in the light of a big lamp with a red shade he spread a piece of parchment rather like a map.

“This was made by your grandfather Thor, he said in answer to the dwarves’ excited questions. “It is a plan of the Mountain.”

“I don’t see that this will help us much,” said Thorin disappointedly after a glance. “I remember the Mountain well enough and the lands about it. And I know where Mirkwood is, and the Withered Heath where the great dragons bred.”

“There is a dragon marked in red on the Mountain,” said Balin, “but it will be easy enough to find him without that, if ever we arrive there.”

“There is one point that you haven’t noticed,” said the wizard, “and that is the secret entrance. You see that rune on the West side, and the hand pointing to it from the other runes? That marks a hidden passage to the Lower Halls.”

“It may have been secret once,” said Thorin, “but how do we know that it is secret any longer? Old Smaug has lived there long enough now to find out anything there is to know about those caves.”

“He may—but he can’t have used it for years and years.”

“Why?”

“Because it is too small. ‘Five feet high the door and three may walk abreast’ say the runes, but Smaug could not creep into a hole that size, not even when he was a young dragon, certainly not after devouring so many of the dwarves and men of Dale.”

“It seems a great big hole to me,” squeaked Bilbo (who had no experience of dragons and only of hobbit-holes). He was getting excited and interested again, so that he forgot to keep his mouth shut. He loved maps. “How could such a large door be kept secret from everybody outside, apart from the dragon?” he asked. He was only a little hobbit you must remember.

“In lots of ways,” said Gandalf. “But in what way this one has been hidden we don’t know without going to see. From what it says on the map I should guess there is a closed door which has been made to look exactly like the side of the Mountain. That is the usual dwarves’ method—I think that is right, isn’t it?”

“Quite right,” said Thorin.

“Also,” went on Gandalf, “I forgot to mention that with the map went a key, a small and curious key. Here it is!” he said, and handed to Thorin a key with a long barrel and intricate wards, made of silver. “Keep it safe!”

“Indeed I will,” said Thorin, and he fastened it upon a fine chain that hung about his neck and under his jacket. “Now things begin to look more hopeful. This news alters them much for the better. So far we have had no clear idea what to do. We thought of going East, as quiet and careful as we could, as far as the as far as the Long Lake. After that the trouble would begin—.”

“A long time before that, if I know anything about the roads East,” interrupted Gandalf.

“We might go from there up along the River Running,” went on Thorin taking no notice, “and so to the ruins of Dale—the old town in the valley there, under the shadow of the Mountain. But we none of us liked the idea of the Front Gate. The river runs right out of it through the great cliff at the South of the Mountain,

and out of it comes the dragon too—far too often, unless he has changed his habits.”

“That would be no good,” said the wizard, “not without a mighty Warrior, even a Hero. I tried to find one; but warriors are busy fighting one another in distant lands, and in this neighbourhood heroes are scarce, or simply not to be found. Swords in these parts are mostly blunt, and axes are used for trees, and shields as cradles or dish-covers; and dragons are comfortably far-off (and therefore legendary). That is why I settled on burglary—especially when I remembered the existence of a Side-door. And here is our little Bilbo Baggins, the burglar, the chosen and selected burglar. So now let’s get on and make some plans.”

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“I have often wondered about my father’s and my grandfather’s escape. I see now they must have had a private Side-door which only they knew about. But apparently they made a map, and I should like to know how Gandalf got hold of it, and why it did not come down to me, the rightful heir.”

“I did not ‘get hold of it,’ I was given it,” said the wizard. “Your grandfather Thrór was killed, you remember, in the mines of Moria by Azog the Goblin.”

“Curse his name, yes,” said Thorin.

“And Thráin your father went away on the twenty-first of April, a hundred years ago last Thursday, and has never been seen by you since—”

“True, true,” said Thorin.

“Well, your father gave me this to give to you; and if I have chosen my own time and way for handing it over, you can hardly blame me, considering the trouble I had to find you. Your father could not remember his own name when he gave me the paper, and he never told me yours; so on the whole I think I ought to be praised and thanked! Here it is,” said he handing the map to Thorin.