away, alone, and crept down, down, into the dark under the mountains.

"Very well," said Bilbo, who was anxious to agree, until he found out more about the creature, whether he was quite alone, whether he was fierce or hungry, and whether he was a friend of the goblins.

"You ask first," he said, because he had not had time to think of a riddle.

So Gollum hissed:

> What has roots as nobody sees,
> Is taller than trees,
> Up, up it goes,
> And yet never grows?

"Easy!" said Bilbo. "Mountain, I suppose."

"Does it guess easy? It must have a competition with us, my preciouss! If precious asks, and it doesn't answer, we eats it, my preciousss. If it asks us, and we doesn't answer, then we does what it wants, eh? We shows it the way out, yes!"

"All right!" said Bilbo, not daring to disagree, and nearly bursting his brain to think of riddles that could save him from being eaten.

> Thirty white horses on a red hill,
> First they champ,
> Then they stamp,
> Then they stand still.
That was all he could think of to ask—the idea of eating was rather on his mind. It was rather an old one, too, and Gollum knew the answer as well as you do.

“Chestnuts, chestnuts,” he hissed. “Teeth! teeth! my preciouss; but we has only six!” Then he asked his second:

Voiceless it cries,
Wingless flutters,
Toothless bites,
Mouthless mutters.

“Half a moment!” cried Bilbo, who was still thinking uncomfortably about eating. Fortunately he had once heard something rather like this before, and getting his wits back he thought of the answer. “Wind, wind of course,” he said, and he was so pleased that he made up one on the spot. “This’ll puzzle the nasty little underground creature,” he thought:

An eye in a blue face
Saw an eye in a green face.
“That eye is like to this eye”
Said the first eye,
“But in low place
Not in high place.”

“Ss, ss, ss,” said Gollum. He had been underground a long long time, and was forgetting this sort of thing. But just as Bilbo was
beginning to hope that the wretch would not be able to answer, Gollum brought up memories of ages and ages and ages before, when he lived with his grandmother in a hole in a bank by a river, “Sss, sss, my precious,” he said. “Sun on the daisies it means, it does.”

But these ordinary above ground everyday sort of riddles were tiring for him. Also they reminded him of days when he had been less lonely and sneaky and nasty, and that put him out of temper. What is more they made him hungry; so this time he tried something a bit more difficult and more unpleasant:

*It cannot be seen, cannot be felt,*  
*Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt.*  
*It lies behind stars and under hills,*  
*And empty holes it fills.*  
*It comes first and follows after,*  
*Ends life, kills laughter.*

Unfortunately for Gollum Bilbo had heard that sort of thing before; and the answer was all round him any way. “Dark!” he said without even scratching his head or putting on his thinking cap.

*A box without hinges, key, or lid,*  
*Yet golden treasure inside is hid,*

he asked to gain time, until he could think of a really hard one. This he thought a dread-
fully easy chestnut, though he had not asked it in the usual words. But it proved a nasty poser for Gollum. He hissed to himself, and still he did not answer; he whispered and spluttered.

After some while Bilbo became impatient. “Well, what is it?” he said. “The answer’s not a kettle boiling over, as you seem to think from the noise you are making.”

“Give us a chance; let it give us a chance, my precious—ss—ss.”

“Well,” said Bilbo after giving him a long chance, “what about your guess?”

But suddenly Gollum remembered thieving from nests long ago, and sitting under the river bank teaching his grandmother, teaching his grandmother to suck—“Eggsses!” he hissed. “Eggsses it is!” Then he asked:

\[
\begin{align*}
Alive without breath, \\
As cold as death; \quad \\
Never thirsty, ever drinking, \quad \\
All in mail never clinking.
\end{align*}
\]

He also in his turn thought this was a dreadfully easy one, because he was always thinking of the answer. But he could not remember anything better at the moment, he was so flustered by the egg-question. All the same it was a poser for poor Bilbo, who never had anything to do with the water if he could help it. I imagine you know the answer, of course, or can guess it as easy as winking,
since you are sitting comfortably at home and have not the danger of being eaten to disturb your thinking. Bilbo sat and cleared his throat once or twice, but no answer came.

After a while Gollum began to hiss with pleasure to himself: “Is it nice, my preciousss? Is it juicy? Is it scrumptiously crunchable?” He began to peer at Bilbo out of the darkness.

“Half a moment,” said the hobbit shivering. “I gave you a good long chance just now.”

“It must make haste, haste!” said Gollum, beginning to climb out of his boat on to the shore to get at Bilbo. But when he put his long webby foot in the water, a fish jumped out in a fright and fell on Bilbo’s toes.

“Ugh!” he said, “it is cold and clammy!”—and so he guessed. “Fish! fish!” he cried. “It is fish!”

Gollum was dreadfully disappointed; but Bilbo asked another riddle as quick as ever he could, so that Gollum had to get back into his boat and think.

_No-legs lay on one-leg, two-legs sat near on three-legs, four-legs got some._

It was not really the right time for this riddle, but Bilbo was in a hurry. Gollum might have had some trouble guessing it, if he had asked it at another time. As it was, talking of fish, “no-legs” was not so very difficult, and after that the rest was easy. “Fish on a little table, man at table sitting on a stool, the cat has the bones” that of course is the answer, and Gollum soon gave it. Then he