

BALIN

(There stands an elderly dwarf /BALIN/ with a white beard and scarlet hood.)

BALIN (hobbling inside, gesturing at the coat rack with his cane). Ha! I see they have begun to arrive already! (Hangs his hood next to Dwalin's.) Balin, at your service! (It is difficult for him to execute a bow. He groans.)

BILBO. Thank you. Uh, you said "They have begun to arrive"?

GANDALF (calling). Groceries, Bilbo?

BILBO. Actually, no---- (Taking a deep breath, to BALIN.) Won't you join us for tea?

BALIN. A glass of buttermilk would suit me better, if it's all the same to you, my good sir. But I don't mind some cake--seed cake, if you have any. (Crosses to table.)

BILBO (automatically). Oh, lots! Excuse me. (Hurries off L to get the cake.)

DWALIN. No hurry. (To BALIN.) Fine lodgings here, eh, brother?

BALIN (seating himself). Ummm. These Hobbits have the cream. A big thing this is we're setting out for.