The air was warm and pleasant as that of an evening in the height of summer, tempering the gentle cool breeze that played upon his skin. Nearby he heard the soft rustling of leaves, the trickling of water, and from far off, there was music. It was singing, but such that he had never heard, beautiful melodies weaving in and out of each other, never quite the same but never quite different, as though the song were alive, growing and blooming like a fair white rose, unfolding one perfect petal after the other, complex and brilliant and yet simple and pure at the same time. Sam breathed in deeply, and tasted a warm scent on the air. It was like roses, or lilies, but it was also like the kitchen when his mother baked spiced apple cakes, or the Ivy Bush Tavern at Yule, when the mulled wine could be smelt from streets away.

Sam opened his eyes, and saw that he was in a garden, sitting upon a well-kept lawn. Standing, he looked at what he had been leaning against, and realised that it was a tree, though none that he had ever seen. Its bark was pale silver, if such a thing were possible, and when he raised his eyes
to the branches above he saw that each bore many leaves that shone with a pure gold. The tree almost seemed to give off its own faint radiance, and he stepped back to admire it more fully, his face too lit with wonder.

"Sam?" called a gentle voice, a voice he knew as well as his own. He turned and saw Frodo, smiling at him, clad in a cloak of simple grey, with a clasp like an unfurling beech leaf. He held his right hand out to Sam.

"Come and listen," he said.

They walked through the trees, hand in hand, and the singing seemed to fill the air as they approached. Passing the final tree, Sam saw that he and Frodo stood near the edge of a small cliff overlooking... overlooking a bay. The sea! It had to be the sea, a mass of water that gently rippled below, reflecting the light of a thousand stars upon each of its tiny crests, lapping gently at the white sands of the beach. Upon the beach were gathered many men and women, tall and beautiful, some with rich golden hair and some with shining ebony locks. It was they that were singing, neither leading nor following one another, but somehow in harmony as if they were all one with the music. Away across the sea, Sam saw light flickering from a distant shore, and realised that the song was coming also from there, not just from the beach below him. Their part in the song was somehow different, fuller maybe but no more or less beautiful... and yet it seemed to Sam that he could hear a third chorus weaving with them, infinitely richer and more wonderful, but he could neither name it nor comprehend it.

He looked at Frodo, who smiled warmly at him.

"They are singing to the stars," he said, "and the stars are singing back."

"Mr. Frodo, where are we?"

"Journey's End, Sam."

"But... what journey? We're only going to Rivendell, sir, and then we're going home. We'll not see anything like this, surely?"

"Ssh..." Frodo squeezed his hand. "Let go of your questions, my dear hobbit. Just listen."

And so Samwise Gamgee let go of his questions, and he listened, and heard the beauty of the elven melodies, weaving and interconnecting and every moment more beautiful than the last, and above all dwelt the stars, timeless and changeless, for the briefest second of their lives returning the song to those who dwelt below. Sam let the music wash over him, and he breathed it in, and it seemed to infuse his body, his heart, his very soul.

Here, the stars seemed to sing, although there were no words in any language he could understand. Take this gift. Take heart, take hope, take strength, for you will need it.

Sam knew not when the music ended and when the sweet sleep undisturbed by image or sound began. He seemed to hear a whisper through the darkness, I am glad you are here with me, and finally the great waves of deep sleep overcame him.

xxxxx

As far as he could remember, Sam slept through the night in deep content, if logs are contented.

J.R., The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

'In the House of Tom Bombadil.'
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