Family business
A role-playing scenario for any rule system, set in the Gondorian province of Lamedon in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth.

1.0 Family business
This is a short adventure designed to send the PCs on a romp through Gondor’s rural backwaters. Numbers and weapon skill are not crucial: cleverness is a stronger asset. The adventure can take place at any time during the Third Age. The only prerequisites are that the PCs must own at least one horse, that they must end a day’s travel through Lamedon in the middle of nowhere, with no inn as far as the eye can see, and that they must look and act peaceful enough to be admitted to the home of an average farmer.

1.1 Background
The PCs are traveling through pastoral Lamedon. It is near nightfall, and the last inn was three miles back. Inn or no, the party needs night lodgings, and over a crest in the road an inviting farm turns up. It might do.

When the PCs dismount a man comes out of the house. It is the owner, a middle-aged farmer named Eskil, and he asks the party’s business. After some haggling he agrees to house and feed the PCs and their horses for about half of what it would cost at a city inn. If the PCs look poor he asks to be payed in advance.

The stable has room for three horses beside Eskil's mules, and the rest are put in a corral near the house. GM's note: saddles and harness are most likely put in the stable, but an interesting question is where the saddlebags end up. Try to establish this without alerting the players’ suspicion - one method is to simply inform them that "saddles, saddlebags and harness are left in the stable", hoping that they will not contradict you. Anyway, they will not be able to bring the horses into the house.

Inside, the PCs are served mutton stew, coarse bread, white cheese and goat milk, and Eskil and the women of his family encourage them to tell stories from their travels. Note that most of the year all of the young men are out with the flocks, and will not be present at the farm. Eskil proudly reveals that his daughter Edla is going to marry the heir of the neighboring farm in a week. He beams at his daughter, who smiles tensely and eats little. Her mother Virnia comfortingly tells her that she also had misgivings before she married Eskil, but points out that it was not so bad. Everyone laughs. However, sensitive characters note that the girl is still troubled.

The evening passes, and bedtime arrives. The PCs are assigned bunks in the attic. Those present of the young men retreat to the barn, but the eldest son, his wife and his sister sleep in the main room below the characters.

Night passes uneventfully. A cautious character with acute hearing might hear muffled sounds in the darkest hours, but nothing alarming. Probably just someone off to the privy. If a PC tries something stupid, like making nightly advances on the daughter or Eskil's possessions, the whole house will be awake in a matter of minutes and Eskil will appear stark naked, swinging a wood-axe over his head. But that is a different adventure, which is left to the improvisational skills of the GM.

The PCs are wakened in the early morning by agitated voices, above which can be heard an apparently outraged Eskil bawling "The damn girl! Oh, when I get hold of her! Damn!". Bedraggled PCs stumble down the ladder and confront the family. Eskil tries to explain, now and then pausing for an outburst of curses, that his daughter apparently has chosen to elope during the night on the back of one of the PCs' horses! To boot, she seems to have rummaged in the saddlebags, if they happened to be in the stable. If so, she will
have taken dried food, small amounts of money, and any pretty, preferably magical bauble that the adventurers might possess.

While the players eat their breakfast and adapt to the new situation, Eskil rages and Virnia tries to placate her guests. She is visibly deeply shamed over her daughter's outrageous behavior, but begs the player characters not to take any hasty action: Edla will surely be back soon with what she has stolen. Her brothers will find her, it will not be hard, since everyone knows the reason for her disappearance.

Edla has often spoken with enthusiasm of Adrin, a son of one of the neighboring families. He, however, is not a good match. Edla is scheduled to marry a fine young man in a week's time, but she has shown by all means that she does not like the prospect. She must certainly have run off with Adrin somewhere, and it will not take a minute to find them. At worst, the wedding will have to be postponed for a week, but Edla's future husband does not have to learn the exact reason for this. Virnia earnestly begs the PCs to have mercy since the future happiness of her admittedly shameless daughter is at stake.

1.2 Plot outline
Adrin turns out not to have left his home the crucial night, and no trace of Edla can be found linking him to the outrageous act of disrespect. Actually, his friend Hallas has escorted the young lady to a shepherds' hut where Adrin can join her as soon as the coast is clear. This follows a well-known behavior pattern among the Lamedondrim.

The inheritance system and the need for assistance with the flocks lend a very strong importance to marriages between the land-holding families. Alliances of trust and of property are forged through the marrying off of one's children to strategic spouses. This, however, is a perennial source of frustration to young people who have other things in mind than strategic pasture management. When all else fails, nubile maidens may be abducted by their hearts' beloved, whereupon the young couple is invariably chased the length of the land by the woman's brothers. The traditional resolution of these dramas is that the young couple stays in hiding until she is pregnant, after which her father is confronted with fait accompli and a hopefully acceptable bride price. He rarely refuses it.

The player characters will with a bit of sleuthing be able to find out what has happened, and reach the young couple just as they are assaulted by the girl's brothers. At this point the player characters have to choose sides in the family conflict and try to get their stolen possessions back. Their motivation for meddling in family business is the fact that some of their valuable equipment is on the run without them. The GM's motivation for sending them on this particular chase is intended to be that it forces them to take the scenic route through Lamedon, which they might otherwise miss.

2.0 The NPCs

2.1 The Eskilion family
Eskil: the farmer. A huge, fiftyish, choleric man with grey-streaked chestnut hair and beard, and brown eyes.
Virnia: his wife. A stocky, fiftyish, strong-willed woman with long jet-black hair in a tight knot, and brown eyes.
Pickor: their oldest son. A heavy-set, thirtyish, easy-going man with chestnut hair and beard, and brown eyes.
Erling: their middle son. A slight, mid-twentyish, solemn man with black hair and brown eyes.
Joar: their youngest son. A gangling, twentyish, hot-tempered young man with auburn hair and a ridiculous wispy moustache. Same brown-eye genes in him.
Hillas: Pickor's wife. A plump, mid-twentyish, shy woman with straw-colored hair and grey eyes. She is visibly pregnant with her and Pickor's first child.
Orvil: Hillas' brother, a farmhand. A tall, twentyish, slow young man with straw-colored hair and blue eyes.

2.2 Edla Eskiliel
Edla is the younger daughter of Eskil and Virnia. Her older sister Sandhis is married and lives across the river Ciril. Edla is tall and skinny, with glittering brown eyes in a plain face framed in chestnut hair. She is in her early twenties, and thus eligible for marriage. Eskil has consequently negotiated a marriage for her with Wilfer, the eldest son of Brakas, Eskil's southern neighbor. The trouble is that Edla does not like the dour and uncouth Wilfer. Several years of brief, clandestine meetings with Adrin Enarion have instead convinced her that he would make a good husband. Unfortunately, all Adrin can hope for is a meager co-ownership of his family's rather measly property, and this makes him a less than splendid candidate from Eskil's point of view. Eskil has put his boot-heel down on Edla's hints, but she is a stubborn person, and this is a very important issue to her.

2.3 Adrin Enarion
Enar's land is located to the north of Eskil's. Enar is old, and his sons do most of the work. Adrin is the youngest of four brothers, and about Edla's age. He is a thoughtful young man who spends a lot of time musing while the sheep dogs do his work. He is not exactly dashing, but handsome enough, clean-shaven with an unruly mop of black hair and blue eyes. He completely agrees with Edla about whom she should marry. He has actually asked his father, Enar, to discuss the issue with Eskil, but Enar has refused on the grounds that Eskil's answer would be all too predictable.

2.4 Hallas Benokion
Hallas is the only son of Benok, the man who owns the land to the north of Enar's. Adrin and Hallas have been friends ever since the first childhood afternoon they spent sorting out their mixed-up flocks, and this is why Hallas has volunteered to help Adrin and Edla pull the old "abduction" trick. Hallas is a couple of years older than Adrin, and smug in the knowledge that his marriage is already arranged to his liking. He is heavy-set and sports a curly black beard. His eyes are brown.

3.0 The Settings

3.1 Eskil's farm
This is a typical Lamedondrim family farm, and the description also fits the neighboring farms of Enar, Benok and Brakas pretty well. The farms lie a mile or so apart. The only atypical characteristic of Eskil's farm is that it is not necessarily located near the river - instead it happens to be near the point on a road where the PCs decide that they need to find lodgings for the night.

The main building is a U-shaped, single story stone house with a thatched roof. The living quarters are in the left wing. The central part houses a stable with two mules, a cart and the toolroom, and the right wing is used for storing fodder and wool. Other buildings are a dairy shed, a chicken-coop and a privy. If the river turns out to be distant, a well is found between the wings of the main building.

Near the houses are several large pens used for the shearing of sheep and goats, which takes place in the spring. A couple of fenced fields of modest proportions can be seen some way off.

Most of the living-space in the farmhouse is taken up by a single large room, with a big hearth at one end (the mules are on the other side of the wall). Built-in benches around the walls double as beds, and a large table surrounded with wooden stools occupies the
middle of the room. At the other end of the room are found the doors to the master bedroom and the larder (locked). Odds and ends of everyday life are stored under the benches and hang from hooks in the not-too-lofty ceiling. Two looms flank the table. Outdoor clothes are hung on pegs in the wall to both sides of the entrance. A ladder on the wall opposite the entrance leads through a hole in the ceiling to the attic.

3.2 The shepherds' hut
This is one of the innumerable simple huts that accommodate Lamedondrim shepherds out with the flocks. It is located in a high meadow on Benok's, Hallas' father's land. The hut is not likely to be visited for at least the time it takes to get pregnant, which is why Hallas has chosen it for his friends. Depending on the season the meadow might either be newly grazed by goats or just plain withered. The hut is an unfurnished, single-room stone structure with a sod-roof. The hut is reached on a narrow goat-path just level enough to permit the passage of a horse.

4.0 The Task

4.1 Starting the players
When the PCs have eaten and dressed, Eskil has calmed down a bit. He soberly admits to the PCs that what has happened is an outrage, and refuses to accept payment for food and lodgings. Any advance payment is returned. Eskil invites the PCs to join him in fetching his daughter, although they may stay loafing about the farm if they choose.

Eskil puts a crude saddle on one of the mules and rides off north to Enar's farm, where he causes a scene and demands to search the premises. Old Enar is completely ignorant of the youngsters' scheme, and is thus first dumbfounded and then gradually grows angry as Eskil stomps about his farm. Adrin is at the farm with his whole family as an alibi for the night, and Eskil shouts at him and tries to give him a beating, but is prevented by Adrin's older brothers. If the PCs came along to Enar's they might involve themselves in the proceedings, or just stand around and watch the fireworks. In the end Eskil begins to suspect that he might have jumped to the wrong conclusion. He sheepishly apologizes to the bristling Enar and rides off home after one last piercing glance at Adrin, who for some reason looks pained and worried.

Back at his farm Eskil proceeds to call his sons back home if they are out with the flocks. He intends to send them out to search for Edla. Eskil plainly states to the PCs that he intends to compensate them for the stolen property, but that he has not got a lot of money at the moment. His suggestion is that they stay at the farm for a couple of days during which Edla and the stolen goods might be found, or at worst so he might borrow money enough.

No self-respecting adventurer will spend these days just waiting for the stuff to reappear. The PCs will most probably start an investigation of their own, while Eskil's sons also do what they can to find their delinquent sister. The PCs might even join forces with the brothers.

4.2 Aids
With a bit of questioning the PCs will learn what is common knowledge, i.e. that Adrin's best friend is named Hallas Benokion, where Benok's farm is, that Wilfer Brakasion indeed is rich but not a particularly nice guy, and that there are lots of folk-tales about young people eloping rather than marrying according to the wishes of their parents. Exactly what they will learn depends on what they ask, and the GM will have to dish out a fair bit of irrelevant information. Apart from the easy pickings, the potential sources of information are:
Adrin himself. He's extremely unpleasantly surprised that Edla and Hallas stole the horse, since this involves strangers and might send them all to jail. He will not confide in the PCs, but he might be tailed the night after Eskil's loud-mouthed visit as he rides up to the shepherds' hut to confer with Hallas and Edla. This will be very hard for anyone without elven-sight or intimate knowledge of the area.

Adrin's talkative, six-year-old niece Pilva. She has overheard a conversation between Adrin and Hallas and knows that Edla is probably "up in Benok's sheep-shack on the mountain". This she will lispingly divulge only to a sympathetic character who takes the time to ask properly.

The Benokion family. Hallas' family knows that he is up to something since he has borrowed a mule and performed some strange comings and goings. However, they do not know what he has been doing. This they might tell those who identify themselves, establish some kind of trust and ask for the young man.

Hallas. Depending upon the season he will most probably visit his home only briefly, hurrying back to his sheep when Adrin and Edla are installed at the hut. He will not tell the PCs anything, but will ask them a lot of questions to ascertain their intentions. This inquisitiveness might strike the players as suspicious.

The tracks of the PC's horse at Eskil's farm. A good tracker will be able to follow them a bit from the farm, and will learn that Edla was accompanied by another rider when she left. The tracks point roughly north, but not the way one would choose if one were heading for Enar's farm. (They point more or less towards the shepherds' hut, but cannot be followed for very long.)

The tell-tale wisp of smoke from the fireplace of a shepherds' hut with no sign of any sheep around it. The horse is kept out of view from the valley.

4.3 Obstacles
The main obstacles of the investigation are simply that the PCs most probably are strangers without knowledge of the land. "Benok's sheep shack" might be any one of ten shacks a mile apart.

The PCs will be one short in mounts, but may borrow one of Eskil's mules as long as he does not get the impression that they intend to keep it and never come back.

If they try for a happy ending they must understand that Edla will have an extremely hard time if she is marked as a horse-thief in the common mind. This will complicate their investigations, since they will not be able to tell their informers exactly why they are asking questions.

4.4 Rewards
Along the way, the PCs will probably become soft-hearted at the predicament of the two young lovers. Thus, complete success will not only be a question of regaining the stolen property, but also of somehow relieving the tension of the age-old family drama. At best, the PCs might continue their travels with all their stuff, leaving behind them the happily married Edla and Adrin somehow reconciled with Edla's family. This will provide the PCs with a set of loyal friends in Lamedon who may come in handy in future adventures.

4.5 Failure
If the PCs cannot find the young couple and the GM feels that the players have had their share of gentle nudges in the right direction, Pickor, Erling and Joar one evening return to the farm with Edla, the horse and any of the PCs possessions that were stolen. Edla is bruised and apathetic, and the brothers curtly explain that Adrin was the culprit but that he will be no nuisance in the near future. This is correct - Adrin lies unconscious outside the shepherd's hut with a lot of broken bones. Edla will be married to Wilfer unless word spreads of what has passed, in which case she will never be married at all. The adventure
ends on a note of despair. From a practical point of view one might conclude that this means that the PCs might as well lay back from the start and wait for their stuff to return, but this they cannot know in advance. Anyway, descriptions of Edla's bitter fate will make them feel their failure.

5.0 Encounters

5.1 La Grande Finale
Adrin joins Edla and Hallas at the shepherd's hut the night after Edla's escape. The three of them have a heated argument about the horse-theft and its implications, but can find no sensible course of action. Hallas leaves before dawn, returning Adrin's mule to Enar's stable. Edla and Adrin are in low spirits but see no other possibility than to keep the horse and follow their initial plan of consuming their marriage in advance.

The PCs will probably find them in a couple of days, either by themselves or in the company of Edla's brothers. If the PCs have operated alone the brothers will conveniently find the hut only a short while after the PCs, thus creating an interesting situation.

No matter who finds them first, Edla and Adrin will panic. Unless the chasers are very careful they will be noticed in advance, and their quarry will try to escape. Since the only sensible escape route is down the path, it will take some mighty fancy footwork from Edla and Adrin on the stolen horse to get past the approaching danger. They simply will not make it.

Pickor, Erling and Joar want to seize their sister and beat Adrin up thoroughly. Adrin wants to get out of the nasty situation, preferably together with Edla. Edla too wants to get out, but since it does not seem very likely that she will, she will threaten to kill herself with a knife.

None of the four men wear armor, but they all wield hooked shepherds' staffs with some precision. The players must understand that Pickor, Erling and Joar are ordinary and pretty nice Lamedondrim men acting according to grim tradition, Pickor even having a pregnant wife - it is not a good solution for any of the involved to hack them down.

If the PCs simply stand back, an unpleasant stalemate will be reached, with Edla pointing a knife at her chest, Adrin lying beaten to the ground, and the three brothers unsure of what to do and of how seriously to take Edla's threat. But, since PCs rarely do stand back, almost anything might happen. The ending will be up to their wits and intuition.

Solutions might include a famous and/or wealthy PC tangibly blessing a union between Edla and Adrin, thereby compensating somewhat for Adrin's meager economic means, or at least putting a weight of outsider prestige behind the match. If the players are to effect a happy ending they will have to face and convince Eskil, a situation which may inspire some good role-playing.