it more than he could help, but really he had begun to get very interested. You see, in the old days he had known the very part of the mountains that Gandalf was describing. He nodded and he growled, when he heard of the hobbit’s reappearance and of their scramble down the stone-slide and of the wolf-ring in the woods.

When Gandalf came to their climbing into trees with the wolves all underneath, he got up and strode about and muttered: “I wish I had been there! I would have given them more than fireworks!”

“Well,” said Gandalf very glad to see that his tale was making a good impression, “I did the best I could. There we were with the wolves going mad underneath us and the forest beginning to blaze in places, when the goblins came down from the hills and discovered us. They yelled with delight and sang songs making fun of us. Fifteen birds in five fir-trees . . .”

“Good heavens!” growled Beorn. “Don’t pretend that goblins can’t count. They can. Twelve isn’t fifteen and they know it.”

“And so do I. There were Bifur and Bofur as well. I haven’t ventured to introduce them before, but here they are.”

In came Bifur and Bofur. “And me!” gasped Bombur puffing up behind. He was fat, and also angry at being left till last. He refused to wait five minutes, and followed immediately after the other two.

“Well, now there are fifteen of you; and since goblins can count, I suppose that is all
that there were up the trees. Now perhaps we can finish this story without any more interruptions.” Mr. Baggins saw then how clever Gandalf had been. The interruptions had really made Beorn more interested in the story, and the story had kept him from sending the dwarves off at once like suspicious beggars. He never invited people into his house, if he could help it. He had very few friends and they lived a good way away; and he never invited more than a couple of these to his house at a time. Now he had got fifteen strangers sitting in his porch!

By the time the wizard had finished his tale and had told of the eagles’ rescue and of how they had all been brought to the Carrock, the sun had fallen behind the peaks of the Misty Mountains and the shadows were long in Beorn’s garden.

“A very good tale!” said he. “The best I have heard for a long while. If all beggars could tell such a good one, they might find me kinder. You may be making it all up, of course, but you deserve a supper for the story all the same. Let’s have something to eat!”

“Yes please!” they all said together. “Thank you very much!”

Inside the hall it was now quite dark. Beorn clapped his hands, and in trotted four beautiful white ponies and several large long-bodied grey dogs. Beorn said something to them in a queer language like animal noises turned into talk. They went out again and soon came
back carrying torches in their mouths, which they lit at the fire and stuck in low brackets on the pillars of the hall about the central hearth. The dogs could stand on their hind-legs when they wished, and carry things with their fore-feet. Quickly they got out boards and trestles from the side walls and set them up near the fire.

Then baa—baa—baa! was heard, and in came some snow-white sheep led by a large coal-black ram. One bore a white cloth embroidered at the edges with figures of animals; others bore on their broad backs trays with bowls and platters and knives and wooden spoons, which the dogs took and quickly laid on the trestle-tables. These were very low, low enough even for Bilbo to sit at comfortably. Beside them a pony pushed two low-seated benches with wide rush-bottoms and little short thick legs for Gandalf and Thorin, while at the far end he put Beorn's big black chair of the same sort (in which he sat with his great legs stuck far out under the table). These were all the chairs he had in his hall, and he probably had them low like the tables for the convenience of the wonderful animals that waited on him. What did the rest sit on? They were not forgotten. The other ponies came in rolling round drum-shaped sections of logs, smoothed and polished, and low enough even for Bilbo; so soon they were all seated at Beorn's table, and the hall had not seen such a gathering for many a year.
There they had a supper, or a dinner, such as they had not had since they left the Last Homely House in the West and said good-bye to Elrond. The light of the torches and the fire flickered about them, and on the table were two tall red beeswax candles. All the time they ate, Beorn in his deep rolling voice told tales of the wild lands on this side of the mountains, and especially of the dark and dangerous wood, that lay outstretched far to North and South a day’s ride before them, barring their way to the East, the terrible forest of Mirkwood.

The dwarves listened and shook their beards, for they knew that they must soon venture into that forest and that after the mountains it was the worst of the perils they had to pass before they came to the dragon’s stronghold. When dinner was over they began to tell tales of their own, but Beorn seemed to be growing drowsy and paid little heed to them. They spoke most of gold and silver and jewels and the making of things by smith-craft, and Beorn did not appear to care for such things: there were no things of gold or silver in his hall, and few save the knives were made of metal at all.

They sat long at the table with their wooden drinking-bowls filled with mead. The dark night came on outside. The fires in the middle of the hall were built with fresh logs and the torches were put out, and still they sat in the light of the dancing flames with the pillars of the house standing tall behind them, and dark at the top like trees of
the forest. Whether it was magic or not, it seemed to Bilbo that he heard a sound like wind in the branches stirring in the rafters, and the hoot of owls. Soon he began to nod with sleep and the voices seemed to grow far away, until he woke with a start.

The great door had creaked and slammed. Beorn was gone. The dwarves were sitting cross-legged on the floor round the fire, and presently they began to sing. Some of the verses were like this, but there were many more, and their singing went on for a long while:

The wind was on the withered heath,  
but in the forest stirred no leaf:  
there shadows lay by night and day,  
and dark things silent crept beneath.

The wind came down from mountains cold,  
and like a tide it roared and rolled;  
the branches groaned, the forest moaned,  
and leaves were laid upon the mould.

The wind went on from West to East;  
all movement in the forest ceased,  
but shrill and harsh across the marsh  
its whistling voices were released.

The grasses hissed, their tassels bent,  
the reeds were rattling—on it went  
o'er shaken pool under heavens cool  
where racing clouds were torn and rent.
It passed the lonely Mountain bare
and swept above the dragon's lair:
there black and dark lay boulders stark
and flying smoke was in the air.

It left the world and took its flight
over the wide seas of the night.
The moon set sail upon the gale,
and stars were fanned to leaping light.

Bilbo began to nod again. Suddenly up stood Gandalf.

“It is time for us to sleep,” he said, “—for us, but not I think for Beorn. In this hall we can rest sound and safe, but I warn you all not to forget what Beorn said before he left us: you must not stray outside until the sun is up, on your peril.”

Bilbo found that beds had already been laid at the side of the hall, on a sort of raised platform between the pillars and the outer wall. For him there was a little mattress of straw and woollen blankets. He snuggled into them very gladly, summertime though it was. The fire burned low and he fell asleep. Yet in the night he woke: the fire had now sunk to a few embers; the dwarves and Gandalf were all asleep, to judge by their breathing; a splash of white on the floor came from the high moon, which was peering down through the smoke-hole in the roof.

There was a growling sound outside, and a noise as of some great animal scuffling at the door. Bilbo wondered what it was,
and whether it could be Beorn in enchanted shape, and if he would come in as a bear and kill them. He dived under the blankets and hid his head, and fell asleep again at last in spite of his fears.

It was full morning when he awoke. One of the dwarves had fallen over him in the shadows where he lay, and had rolled down with a bump from the platform on to the floor. It was Bofur, and he was grumbling about it, when Bilbo opened his eyes.

"Get up lazybones," he said, "or there will be no breakfast left for you."

Up jumped Bilbo. "Breakfast!" he cried. "Where is breakfast?"

"Mostly inside us," answered the other dwarves who were moving about the hall; "but what is left is out on the veranda. We have been about looking for Beorn ever since the sun got up; but there is no sign of him anywhere, though we found breakfast laid as soon as we went out."

"Where is Gandalf?" asked Bilbo, moving off to find something to eat as quick as he could.

"O! out and about somewhere," they told him. But he saw no sign of the wizard all that day until the evening. Just before sunset he walked into the hall, where the hobbit and the dwarves were having supper, waited on by Beorn's wonderful animals, as they had been all day. Of Beorn they had seen and
heard nothing since the night before, and they were getting puzzled.

“Where is our host, and where have you been all day yourself?” they all cried.

“One question at a time—and none till after supper! I haven’t had a bite since breakfast.”

At last Gandalf pushed away his plate and jug—he had eaten two whole loaves (with masses of butter and honey and clotted cream) and drunk at least a quart of mead—and he took out his pipe. “I will answer the second question first,” he said, “—but bless me! this is a splendid place for smoke rings!” Indeed for a long time they could get nothing more out of him, he was so busy sending smoke rings dodging round the pillars of the hall, changing them into all sorts of different shapes and colours, and setting them at last chasing one another out of the hole in the roof. They must have looked very queer from outside, popping out into the air one after another, green, blue, red, silver-grey, yellow, white; big ones, little ones; little ones dodging through big ones and joining into figure-eights, and going off like a flock of birds into the distance.

“I have been picking out bear-tracks,” he said at last. “There must have been a regular bears’ meeting outside here last night. I soon saw that Beorn could not have made them all: there were far too many of them, and they were of various sizes too. I should say there were little bears, large bears, ordinary bears, and gigantic big bears, all dancing
outside from dark to nearly dawn. They came from almost every direction, except from the west over the river, from the Mountains. In that direction only one set of footprints led—none coming, only ones going away from here. I followed these as far as the Carrock. There they disappeared into the river, but the water was too deep and strong beyond the rock for me to cross. It is easy enough, as you remember, to get from this bank to the Carrock by the ford, but on the other side is a cliff standing up from a swirling channel. I had to walk miles before I found a place where the river was wide and shallow enough for me to wade and swim, and then miles back again to pick up the tracks again. By that time it was too late for me to follow them far. They went straight off in the direction of the pine-woods on the east side of the Misty Mountains, where we had our pleasant little party with the Wargs the night before last. And now I think I have answered your first question, too,” ended Gandalf, and he sat a long while silent.

Bilbo thought he knew what the wizard meant. “What shall we do,” he cried, “if he leads all the Wargs and the goblins down here? We shall all be caught and killed! I thought you said he was not a friend of theirs.”

“So I did. And don’t be silly! You had better go to bed, your wits are sleepy.”

The hobbit felt quite crushed, and as there seemed nothing else to do he did go to bed; and while the dwarves were still singing
songs he dropped asleep, still puzzling his little head about Beorn, till he dreamed a dream of hundreds of black bears dancing slow heavy dances round and round in the moonlight in the courtyard. Then he woke up when everyone else was asleep, and he heard the same scraping, scuffling, snuffling, and growling as before.

Next morning they were all wakened by Beorn himself. “So here you all are still!” he said. He picked up the hobbit and laughed: “Not eaten up by Wargs or goblins or wicked bears yet I see”; and he poked Mr. Baggins’ waistcoat most disrespectfully. “Little bunny is getting nice and fat again on bread and honey,” he chuckled. “Come and have some more!”

So they all went to breakfast with him. Beorn was most jolly for a change; indeed he seemed to be in a splendidly good humour and set them all laughing with his funny stories; nor did they have to wonder long where he had been or why he was so nice to them, for he told them himself. He had been over the river and right back up into the mountains—from which you can guess that he could travel quickly, in bear’s shape at any rate. From the burnt wolf-glade he had soon found out that part of their story was true; but he had found more than that: he had caught a Warg and a goblin wandering in the woods. From these he had got news: the goblin patrols were still hunting with Wargs for the dwarves, and they were fiercely angry because of the death of the Great Goblin,