I think it sounded more like fright than excitement! In fact, if it had not been for the sign on the door, I should have been sure we had come to the wrong house. As soon as I clapped eyes on the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat, I had my doubts. He looks more like a grocer than a burglar!"

Then Mr. Baggins turned the handle and went in. The Took side had won. He suddenly felt he would go without bed and breakfast to be thought fierce. As for little fellow bobbing on the mat it almost made him really fierce. Many a time afterwards the Baggins part regretted what he did now, and he said to himself: "Bilbo, you were a fool; you walked right in and put your foot in it."

"Pardon me," he said, "if I have overheard words that you were saying. I don't pretend to understand what you are talking about, or your reference to burglars, but I think I am right in believing" (this is what he called being on his dignity) "that you think I am no good. I will show you. I have no signs on my door—it was painted a week ago,—and I am quite sure you have come to the wrong house. As soon as I saw your funny faces on the door-step, I had my doubts. But treat it as the right one. Tell me what you want done, and I will try it, if I have to walk from here to the East of East and fight the wild Were-worms in the Last Desert. I had a great-great-great-grand-uncle once, Bullroarer Took, and—"

"Yes, yes, but that was long ago," said Gloin. "I was talking about you. And I assure
you there is a mark on this door—the usual one in the trade, or used to be. *Burglar wants a good job, plenty of Excitement and reasonable Reward*, that’s how it is usually read. You can say *Expert Treasure-hunter* instead of *Burglar* if you like. Some of them do. It’s all the same to us. Gandalf told us that there was a man of the sort in these parts looking for a Job at once, and that he had arranged for a meeting here this Wednesday tea-time.”

“Of course there is a mark,” said Gandalf. “I put it there myself. For very good reasons. You asked me to find the fourteenth man for your expedition, and I chose Mr. Baggins. Just let any one say I chose the wrong man or the wrong house, and you can stop at thirteen and have all the bad luck you like, or go back to digging coal.”

He scowled so angrily at Gloin that the dwarf huddled back in his chair; and when Bilbo tried to open his mouth to ask a question, he turned and frowned at him and stuck out his bushy eyebrows, till Bilbo shut his mouth tight with a snap. “That’s right,” said Gandalf. “Let’s have no more argument. I have chosen Mr. Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself. You may (possibly) all live to thank me yet. Now Bilbo, my boy, fetch the lamp, and let’s have a little light on this!”
On the table in the light of a big lamp with a red shade he spread a piece of parchment rather like a map.

“This was made by Thror, your grandfather, Thorin,” he said in answer to the dwarves’ excited questions. “It is a plan of the Mountain.”

“I don’t see that this will help us much,” said Thorin disappointedly after a glance. “I remember the Mountain well enough and the lands about it. And I know where Mirkwood is, and the Withered Heath where the great dragons bred.”

“There is a dragon marked in red on the Mountain,” said Balin, “but it will be easy enough to find him without that, if ever we arrive there.”

“There is one point that you haven’t noticed,” said the wizard, “and that is the secret entrance. You see that rune on the West side, and the hand pointing to it from the other runes? That marks a hidden passage to the Lower Halls.” (Look at the map at the beginning of this book, and you will see there the runes.)

“It may have been secret once,” said Thorin, “but how do we know that it is secret any longer? Old Smaug has lived there long enough now to find out anything there is to know about those caves.”

“He may—but he can’t have used it for years and years.”

“Why?”

“Because it is too small. ‘Five feet high the door and three may walk abreast’ say
the runes, but Smaug could not creep into a hole that size, not even when he was a young dragon, certainly not after devouring so many of the dwarves and men of Dale.”

“It seems a great big hole to me,” squeaked Bilbo (who had no experience of dragons and only of hobbit-holes). He was getting excited and interested again, so that he forgot to keep his mouth shut. He loved maps, and in his hall there hung a large one of the Country Round with all his favourite walks marked on it in red ink. “How could such a large door be kept secret from everybody outside, apart from the dragon?” he asked. He was only a little hobbit you must remember.

“In lots of ways,” said Gandalf. “But in what way this one has been hidden we don’t know without going to see. From what it says on the map I should guess there is a closed door which has been made to look exactly like the side of the Mountain. That is the usual dwarves’ method—I think that is right, isn’t it?”

“Quite right,” said Thorin.

“Also,” went on Gandalf, “I forgot to mention that with the map went a key, a small and curious key. Here it is!” he said, and handed to Thorin a key with a long barrel and intricate wards, made of silver. “Keep it safe!”

“Indeed I will,” said Thorin, and he fastened it upon a fine chain that hung about his neck and under his jacket. “Now things begin to look more hopeful. This news alters
them much for the better. So far we have had no clear idea what to do. We thought of going East, as quiet and careful as we could, as far as the Long Lake. After that the trouble would begin—.”

“A long time before that, if I know anything about the roads East,” interrupted Gandalf.

“We might go from there up along the River Running,” went on Thorin taking no notice, “and so to the ruins of Dale—the old town in the valley there, under the shadow of the Mountain. But we none of us liked the idea of the Front Gate. The river runs right out of it through the great cliff at the South of the Mountain, and out of it comes the dragon too—far too often, unless he has changed his habits.”

“That would be no good,” said the wizard, “not without a mighty Warrior, even a Hero. I tried to find one; but warriors are busy fighting one another in distant lands, and in this neighbourhood heroes are scarce, or simply not to be found. Swords in these parts are mostly blunt, and axes are used for trees, and shields as cradles or dish-covers; and dragons are comfortably far-off (and therefore legendary). That is why I settled on *burglary*—especially when I remembered the existence of a Side-door. And here is our little Bilbo Baggins, *the* burglar, the chosen and selected burglar. So now let’s get on and make some plans.”

“Very well then,” said Thorin, “supposing the burglar-expert gives us some ideas