came down, down, down towards the ring of the wolves and the meeting-place of the goblins.

A very good thing too! Dreadful things had been going on down there. The wolves that had caught fire and fled into the forest had set it alight in several places. It was high summer, and on this eastern side of the mountains there had been little rain for some time. Yellowing bracken, fallen branches, deep-piled pine-needles, and here and there dead trees, were soon in flames. All round the clearing of the Wargs fire was leaping. But the wolf-guards did not leave the trees. Maddened and angry they were leaping and howling round the trunks, and cursing the dwarves in their horrible language, with their tongues hanging out, and their eyes shining as red and fierce as the flames.

Then suddenly goblins came running up yelling. They thought a battle with the woodmen was going on; but they soon learned what had really happened. Some of them actually sat down and laughed. Others waved their spears and clashed the shafts against their shields. Goblins are not afraid of fire, and they soon had a plan which seemed to them most amusing.

Some got all the wolves together in a pack. Some stacked fern and brushwood round the tree-trunks. Others rushed round and stamped and beat, and beat and stamped, until nearly all the flames were put out—but they did not put out the fire nearest to the trees where the dwarves were. That
fire they fed with leaves and dead branches and bracken. Soon they had a ring of smoke and flame all round the dwarves, a ring which they kept from spreading outwards; but it closed slowly in, till the running fire was licking the fuel piled under the trees. Smoke was in Bilbo’s eyes, he could feel the heat of the flames; and through the reek he could see the goblins dancing round and round in a circle like people round a midsummer bonfire. Outside the ring of dancing warriors with spears and axes stood the wolves at a respectful distance, watching and waiting.

He could hear the goblins beginning a horrible song:

_Fifteen birds in five fir-trees,_
_their feathers were fanned in a fiery breeze!_
_But, funny little birds, they had no wings!_
_O what shall we do with the funny little things?_
_Roast ’em alive, or stew them in a pot;_
_fry them, boil them and eat them hot?_

Then they stopped and shouted out: “Fly away little birds! Fly away if you can! Come down little birds, or you will get roasted in your nests! Sing, sing little birds! Why don’t you sing?”

“Go away! little boys!” shouted Gandalf in answer. “It isn’t bird-nesting time. Also naughty little boys that play with fire get punished.” He said it to make them angry,
and to show them he was not frightened of them—though of course he was, wizard though he was. But they took no notice, and they went on singing.

*Burn, burn tree and fern!*
*Shrivel and scorch! A fizzling torch*
*To light the night for our delight,*
*Ya hey!*
*Bake and toast ’em, fry and roast ’em!*
*till beards blaze, and eyes glaze;*
*till hair smells and skins crack,*
*fat melts, and bones black*
*in cinders lie*
*beneath the sky!*
*So dwarves shall die,*
*and light the night for our delight,*
*Ya hey!*
*Ya-harri-hey!*
*Ya hoy!*

And with that *Ya hoy!* the flames were under Gandalf’s tree. In a moment it spread to the others. The bark caught fire, the lower branches cracked.

Then Gandalf climbed to the top of his tree. The sudden splendour flashed from his wand like lightning, as he got ready to spring down from on high right among the spears of the goblins. That would have been the end of him, though he would probably have killed many of them as he came hurtling down like a thunderbolt. But he never leaped.
Just at that moment the Lord of the Eagles swept down from above, seized him in his talons, and was gone.

There was a howl of anger and surprise from the goblins. Loud cried the Lord of the Eagles, to whom Gandalf had now spoken. Back swept the great birds that were with him, and down they came like huge black shadows. The wolves yammered and gnashed their teeth; the goblins yelled and stamped with rage, and flung their heavy spears in the air in vain. Over them swooped the eagles; the dark rush of their beating wings smote them to the floor or drove them far away; their talons tore at goblin faces. Other birds flew to the tree-tops and seized the dwarves, who were scrambling up now as far as they ever dared to go.

Poor little Bilbo was very nearly left behind again! He just managed to catch hold of Dori’s legs, as Dori was borne off last of all; and up they went together above the tumult and the burning, Bilbo swinging in the air with his arms nearly breaking.

Now far below the goblins and the wolves were scattering far and wide in the woods. A few eagles were still circling and sweeping above the battleground. The flames about the trees sprang suddenly up above the highest branches. They went up in crackling fire. There was a sudden flurry of sparks and smoke. Bilbo had escaped only just in time!
Soon the light of the burning was faint below, a red twinkle on the black floor; and they were high up in the sky, rising all the time in strong sweeping circles. Bilbo never forgot that flight, clinging onto Dori’s ankles. He moaned “my arms, my arms!”; but Dori groaned “my poor legs, my poor legs!”

At the best of times heights made Bilbo giddy. He used to turn queer if he looked over the edge of quite a little cliff; and he had never liked ladders, let alone trees (never having had to escape from wolves before). So you can imagine how his head swam now, when he looked down between his dangling toes and saw the dark lands opening wide underneath him, touched here and there with the light of the moon on a hill-side rock or a stream in the plains.

The pale peaks of the mountains were coming nearer, moonlit spikes of rock sticking out of black shadows. Summer or not, it seemed very cold. He shut his eyes and wondered if he could hold on any longer. Then he imagined what would happen if he did not. He felt sick.

The flight ended only just in time for him, just before his arms gave way. He loosed Dori’s ankles with a gasp and fell onto the rough platform of an eagle’s eyrie. There he lay without speaking, and his thoughts were a mixture of surprise at being saved from the fire, and fear lest he fall off that narrow place into the deep shadows on either side. He was feeling very queer indeed in his head by this time after the dreadful adventures of the last