and fingered by goblins, and quarrelled over by goblins.

I am afraid that was the last they ever saw of those excellent little ponies, including a jolly sturdy little white fellow that Elrond had lent to Gandalf, since his horse was not suitable for the mountain-paths. For goblins eat horses and ponies and donkeys (and other much more dreadful things), and they are always hungry. Just now however the prisoners were thinking only of themselves. The goblins chained their hands behind their backs and linked them all together in a line, and dragged them to the far end of the cavern with little Bilbo tugging at the end of the row.

There in the shadows on a large flat stone sat a tremendous goblin with a huge head, and armed goblins were standing round him carrying the axes and the bent swords that they use. Now goblins are cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted. They make no beautiful things, but they make many clever ones. They can tunnel and mine as well as any but the most skilled dwarves, when they take the trouble, though they are usually untidy and dirty. Hammers, axes, swords, daggers, pickaxes, tongs, and also instruments of torture, they make very well, or get other people to make to their design, prisoners and slaves that have to work till they die for want of air and light. It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at
once, for wheels and engines and explosions always delighted them, and also not working with their own hands more than they could help; but in those days and those wild parts they had not advanced (as it is called) so far. They did not hate dwarves especially, no more than they hated everybody and everything, and particularly the orderly and prosperous; in some parts wicked dwarves had even made alliances with them. But they had a special grudge against Thorin’s people, because of the war which you have heard mentioned, but which does not come into this tale; and anyway goblins don’t care who they catch, as long as it is done smart and secret, and the prisoners are not able to defend themselves.

“Who are these miserable persons?” said the Great Goblin.

“Dwarves, and this!” said one of the drivers, pulling at Bilbo’s chain so that he fell forward onto his knees. “We found them sheltering in our Front Porch.”

“What do you mean by it?” said the Great Goblin turning to Thorin. “Up to no good, I’ll warrant! Spying on the private business of my people, I guess! Thieves, I shouldn’t be surprised to learn! Murderers and friends of Elves, not unlikely! Come! What have you got to say?”

“Thorin the dwarf at your service!” he replied—it was merely a polite nothing. “Of the things which you suspect and imagine we had no idea at all. We sheltered from a storm in what seemed a convenient cave
and unused; nothing was further from our thoughts than inconveniencing goblins in any way whatever.” That was true enough!

“Um!” said the Great Goblin. “So you say! Might I ask what you were doing up in the mountains at all, and where you were coming from, and where you were going to? In fact I should like to know all about you. Not that it will do you much good, Thorin Oakenshield, I know too much about your folk already; but let’s have the truth, or I will prepare something particularly uncomfortable for you!”

“We were on a journey to visit our relatives, our nephews and nieces, and first, second, and third cousins, and the other descendants of our grandfathers, who live on the East side of these truly hospitable mountains,” said Thorin, not quite knowing what to say all at once in a moment, when obviously the exact truth would not do at all.

“He is a liar, O truly tremendous one!” said one of the drivers. “Several of our people were struck by lightning in the cave, when we invited these creatures to come below; and they are as dead as stones. Also he has not explained this!” He held out the sword which Thorin had worn, the sword which came from the Trolls’ lair.

The Great Goblin gave a truly awful howl of rage when he looked at it, and all his soldiers gnashed their teeth, clashed their shields, and stamped. They knew the sword at once. It had killed hundreds of goblins in its time, when the fair elves of Gondolin
hunted them in the hills or did battle before their walls. They had called it Orcrist, Goblin-cleaver, but the goblins called it simply Biter. They hated it and hated worse any one that carried it.

“Murderers and elf-friends!” the Great Goblin shouted. “Slash them! Beat them! Bite them! Gnash them! Take them away to dark holes full of snakes, and never let them see the light again!” He was in such a rage that he jumped off his seat and himself rushed at Thorin with his mouth open.

Just at that moment all the lights in the cavern went out, and the great fire went off poof! into a tower of blue glowing smoke, right up to the roof, that scattered piercing white sparks all among the goblins.

The yells and yammering, croaking, jib-bering and jabbering; howls, growls and curses; shrieking and shrieking, that followed were beyond description. Several hundred wild cats and wolves being roasted slowly alive together would not have compared with it. The sparks were burning holes in the goblins, and the smoke that now fell from the roof made the air too thick for even their eyes to see through. Soon they were falling over one another and rolling in heaps on the floor, biting and kicking and fighting as if they had all gone mad.

Suddenly a sword flashed in its own light. Bilbo saw it go right through the Great Goblin as he stood dumbfounded in the middle of his rage. He fell dead, and the goblin