Up jumped Bilbo, and putting on his dressing-gown went into the dining-room. There he saw nobody, but all the signs of a large and hurried breakfast. There was a fearful mess in the room, and piles of unwashed crocks in the kitchen. Nearly every pot and pan he possessed seemed to have been used. The washing-up was so dismally real that Bilbo was forced to believe the party of the night before had not been part of his bad dreams, as he had rather hoped. Indeed he was really relieved after all to think that they had all gone without him, and without bothering to wake him up (“but with never a thank-you” he thought); and yet in a way he could not help feeling just a trifle disappointed. The feeling surprised him.

“Don’t be a fool, Bilbo Baggins!” he said to himself, “thinking of dragons and all that outlandish nonsense at your age!” So he put on an apron, lit fires, boiled water, and
washed up. Then he had a nice little breakfast in the kitchen before turning out the dining-room. By that time the sun was shining; and the front door was open, letting in a warm spring breeze. Bilbo began to whistle loudly and to forget about the night before. In fact he was just sitting down to a nice little second breakfast in the dining-room by the open window, when in walked Gandalf.

“My dear fellow,” said he, “whenever *are* you going to come? What about *an early start*?—and here you are having breakfast, or whatever you call it, at half past ten! They left you the message, because they could not wait.”

“What message?” said poor Mr. Baggins all in a fluster.

“Great Elephants!” said Gandalf, “you are not at all yourself this morning—you have never dusted the mantelpiece!”

“What’s that got to do with it? I have had enough to do with washing up for fourteen!”

“If you had dusted the mantelpiece, you would have found this just under the clock,” said Gandalf, handing Bilbo a note (written, of course, on his own note-paper).

This is what he read:

“Thorin and Company to Burglar Bilbo greeting! For your hospitality our sincerest thanks, and for your offer of professional assistance our grateful acceptance. Terms: cash on delivery, up to and not exceeding one fourteenth of total profits (if any); all trav-
elling expenses guaranteed in any event; fun-
neral expenses to be defrayed by us or our
representatives, if occasion arises and the
matter is not otherwise arranged for.

“Thinking it unnecessary to disturb your
esteemed repose, we have proceeded in ad-
advance to make requisite preparations, and
shall await your respected person at the
Green Dragon Inn, Bywater, at 11 a.m. sharp.
Trusting that you will be punctual,

“We have the honour to remain

“Yours deeply

“Thorin & Co.”

“That leaves you just ten minutes. You
will have to run,” said Gandalf.

“But—,” said Bilbo.

“No time for it,” said the wizard.

“But—,” said Bilbo again.

“No time for that either! Off you go!”

To the end of his days Bilbo could never
remember how he found himself outside,
without a hat, a walking-stick or any money,
or anything that he usually took when he
went out; leaving his second breakfast half-
finished and quite unwashed-up, pushing
his keys into Gandalf’s hands, and running
as fast as his furry feet could carry him
down the lane, past the great Mill, across The
Water, and then on for a mile or more.

Very puffed he was, when he got to By-
water just on the stroke of eleven, and found
he had come without a pocket-handkerchief!

“Bravo!” said Balin who was standing at
the inn door looking out for him.
Just then all the others came round the corner of the road from the village. They were on ponies, and each pony was slung about with all kinds of baggages, packages, parcels, and paraphernalia. There was a very small pony, apparently for Bilbo.

“Up you two get, and off we go!” said Thorin.

“I’m awfully sorry,” said Bilbo, “but I have come without my hat, and I have left my pocket-handkerchief behind, and I haven’t got any money. I didn’t get your note until after 10.45 to be precise.”

“Don’t be precise,” said Dwalin, “and don’t worry! You will have to manage without pocket-handkerchiefs, and a good many other things, before you get to the journey’s end. As for a hat, I have got a spare hood and cloak in my luggage.”

That’s how they all came to start, jogging off from the inn one fine morning just before May, on laden ponies; and Bilbo was wearing a dark-green hood (a little weather-stained) and a dark-green cloak borrowed from Dwalin. They were too large for him, and he looked rather comic. What his father Bungo would have thought of him, I don’t think. His only comfort was he couldn’t be mistaken for a dwarf, as he had no beard.

They had not been riding very long, when up came Gandalf very splendid on a white horse. He had brought a lot of pocket-handkerchiefs, and Bilbo’s pipe and tobacco. So after that the party went along very merrily, and they told stories or sang songs as