“Well, it is the first time that even a mouse has crept along carefully and quietly under my very nose and not been spotted,” said Balin, “and I take off my hood to you.” Which he did.

“Balin at your service,” said he.

“Your servant, Mr. Baggins,” said Bilbo.

Then they wanted to know all about his adventures after they had lost him, and he sat down and told them everything—except about the finding of the ring (“not just now” he thought). They were particularly interested in the riddle-competition, and shuddered most appreciatively at his description of Gollum.

“And then I couldn't think of any other question with him sitting beside me,” ended Bilbo; “so I said ‘what's in my pocket?’ And he couldn't guess in three goes. So I said: ‘what about your promise? Show me the way out!’ But he came at me to kill me, and I ran, and fell over, and he missed me in the dark. Then I followed him, because I heard him talking to himself. He thought I really knew the way out, and so he was making for it. And then he sat down in the entrance, and I could not get by. So I jumped over him and escaped, and ran down to the gate.”

“What about the guards?” they asked. “Weren't there any?”

“O yes! lots of them; but I dodged 'em. I got stuck in the door, which was only open a crack, and I lost lots of buttons,” he said sadly looking at his torn clothes. “But I squeezed through all right—and here I am.”
The dwarves looked at him with quite a new respect, when he talked about dodging guards, jumping over Gollum, and squeezing through, as if it was not very difficult or very alarming.

“What did I tell you?” said Gandalf laughing. “Mr. Baggins has more about him than you guess.” He gave Bilbo a queer look from under his bushy eyebrows, as he said this, and the hobbit wondered if he guessed at the part of his tale that he had left out.

Then he had questions of his own to ask, for if Gandalf had explained it all by now to the dwarves, Bilbo had not heard it. He wanted to know how the wizard had turned up again, and where they had all got to now.

The wizard, to tell the truth, never minded explaining his cleverness more than once, so now he told Bilbo that both he and Elrond had been well aware of the presence of evil goblins in that part of the mountains. But their main gate used to come out on a different pass, one more easy to travel by, so that they often caught people benighted near their gates. Evidently people had given up going that way, and the goblins must have opened their new entrance at the top of the pass the dwarves had taken, quite recently, because it had been found quite safe up to now.

“I must see if I can’t find a more or less decent giant to block it up again,” said Gandalf, “or soon there will be no getting over the mountains at all.”
As soon as Gandalf had heard Bilbo’s yell he realized what had happened. In the flash which killed the goblins that were grabbing him he had nipped inside the crack, just as it snapped to. He followed after the drivers and prisoners right to the edge of the great hall, and there he sat down and worked up the best magic he could in the shadows.

“A very ticklish business, it was,” he said. “Touch and go!”

But, of course, Gandalf had made a special study of bewitchments with fire and lights (even the hobbit had never forgotten the magic fireworks at Old Took’s midsummer-eve parties, as you remember). The rest we all know—except that Gandalf knew all about the back-door, as the goblins called the lower gate, where Bilbo lost his buttons. As a matter of fact it was well known to anybody who was acquainted with this part of the mountains; but it took a wizard to keep his head in the tunnels and guide them in the right direction.

“They made that gate ages ago,” he said, “partly for a way of escape, if they needed one; partly as a way out into the lands beyond, where they still come in the dark and do great damage. They guard it always and no one has ever managed to block it up. They will guard it doubly after this,” he laughed.

All the others laughed too. After all they had lost a good deal, but they had killed the Great Goblin and a great many others besides, and they had all escaped, so they might be said to have had the best of it so far.
But the wizard called them to their senses. “We must be getting on at once, now we are a little rested,” he said. “They will be out after us in hundreds when night comes on; and already shadows are lengthening. They can smell our footsteps for hours and hours after we have passed. We must be miles on before dusk. There will be a bit of moon, if it keeps fine, and that is lucky. Not that they mind the moon much, but it will give us a little light to steer by.”

“O yes!” he said in answer to more questions from the hobbit. “You lose track of time inside goblin-tunnels. Today’s Thursday, and it was Monday night or Tuesday morning that we were captured. We have gone miles and miles, and come right down through the heart of the mountains, and are now on the other side—quite a short cut. But we are not at the point to which our pass would have brought us; we are too far to the North, and have some awkward country ahead. And we are still pretty high up. Let’s get on!”

“I am dreadfully hungry,” groaned Bilbo, who was suddenly aware that he had not had a meal since the night before the night before last. Just think of that for a hobbit! His stomach felt all empty and loose and his legs all wobbly, now that the excitement was over.

“Can’t help it,” said Gandalf, “unless you like to go back and ask the goblins nicely to let you have your pony back and your luggage.”

“No thank you!” said Bilbo.