

**H**olmes eventually came to a safe place to pause in his ongoing chemical experiment and toddled down the stairs to see what the uproar was. The cook set before us a pot of powerful tea and a plate of scones flavoured with outrage; Patrick leant his gun inside the door and joined us, trusting to his dogs to raise an alarm; we sat around the kitchen table for a council of war.

Holmes and I had long been prepared for this day when his past came to roost on our heads. In fact, given a mere thirty seconds' warning, we were equipped to walk out with the essentials of life on our persons and disappear permanently.

This, we thought, would not require such extreme measures. Instead, we planned how best to instigate our second defence, which we had come up with some years earlier when the local amateur Eastbourne Dramatic Society put on a production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The gentleman playing the lead, a local solicitor of barely forty, did a competent (if somewhat flamboyant) job of acting Holmes; later, we invited him to the house and arrange with him a smaller-scale dramatic rendition of the Great Detective. The thought of acting a pseudo-Holmes in place of the actual Holmes appealed to his droll, Sussex-born sense of humor, and he agreed to be available, if and when we called on him.

It was time to raise the curtain on our idiosyncratic one-man show.

*... this day when his past  
came to roost on our heads...*

**B**y good fortune, our solicitor-actor would be available for several days, to play the part of a genial if rather befuddled elderly farmer who, indeed, happened to bear a resemblance to one Sherlock Holmes. With him in place, the Americans could batter themselves against our doors until they were convinced that their information was faulty, at which time they might go back to the Plains or prairies whence they had come.

Behind our drawn curtains, Holmes returned to his experiment and I to my manuscripts. Before padlocking the trunk, however, I went through the house and collected an armful of treasured memorabilia that called to mind our cases and adventures over the years. They were, with certain exceptions, items of little commercial value—a friend's trademark monocle, one of Holmes' more disreputable pipes, some newspaper clippings—but were they to be spotted by any sharp-witted Sherlockian (if that be not an oxymoron) they could not only give lie to our ruse, they would be themselves vulnerable to the predations of the horde outside: Sherlockians are inveterate collectors.

I arranged them atop my memoirs, and padlocked the lid. When I had more leisure, I should write a letter of explanation to the recipient of the trunk, but today, I had much to do.

*... cases and adventures over the years.*