

I rang Patrick the following evening—trusting that our Sherlockian pursuers lacked the wherewithal to tap lines and trace telephone calls—to ask him to stow the trunk of memoirs with a third party for the present, and heard of the pack's confounding by our actor's cross-county sprint. Patrick told me he would spend another night sleeping in the Land Rover at our door, then load up our trunks and valuables and abandon his post on the morrow, leaving the actor to his play.

We spent a pleasant three days in my second home of Oxford, visiting with old friends, pursuing our varied studies, and worrying not in the least that we would be discovered—the ancient city is generously endowed with ancient academics, and even the closing days of April are cool enough to justify hats and the occasional scarf.

On the fourth day, my medical student greeted our return with the news that a couple of rather odd Americans had come to the door while we were out. With sinking heart, I asked if they had worn lapel pins with pipes, deerstalker caps, or 221B.

No, she replied—they were dogs.

"Holmes," I shouted up the stairs, "time to be off."

However, when I went to get the car out, they were lying wait.

4.

Seeing the press of eager faces at my window, I knew in an instant that I was in mortal danger—or if not mortal, then certainly our sanity was to be challenged. At least ten of them, Americans all, each wearing one or several lapel-decorations depicting a bee or a calabash pipe or the address 221B. They were unmistakable, and unstoppable.

I raised my voice in alarm, and scurried as fast as a woman of 92 can to check the locks on the doors. The cook came to see, and being a woman of wit as well as culinary ability, joined instantly in battenning down our defences. While she went around the perimeter, closing the curtains, I picked up the telephone and summoned assistance: the stout, and stout-hearted, grandson of my old farm manager, both of the generations named Patrick.

In minutes, young Patrick was roaring over the paddocks in his Land Rover, dog and shotgun to hand. The Sherlockians made a hasty retreat, first to the road and then, when Patrick took up a position mid-drive with his shotgun over his arm, up the road in the direction of the village. I was tempted to telephone the inn and request that they deny these invaders entrance, or at least make certain their beer was overly warmed, but on second thought, an open declaration of war might only stir these Americans' dander.

Still, a declaration of war it had become.

5.

Holmes 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 arranged 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 humour, 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.

10.

My Oxford house has a self-contained apartment at the front, in which I habitually install a series of graduate students, mostly women, whose only rent is an agreement to keep the rooms aired and the car's battery charged, to pick me up at the train station if I ring, and to tell the neighbours nothing about me. The resident that year was a small, wide girl with adenoids and a brilliant medical mind, who greeted our 6:00 am arrival in a startling pink dressing gown, a cup of tea in one hand and the current copy of *Lancet* in the other.

I greeted her, and asked if she was aware of any stray Americans asking about me, or if she had received any odd telephone calls. "No calls, no questions," she said. "Shall I bring a bottle of milk through to your kitchen?"

I thanked her for her thoughtfulness, blessed her for her preoccupation, and left luggage and husband in the house while I drove the Mercedes over to the train station for retrieval.

We were safe. I thought.