



ith the trunk of manuscripts and

memorabilia securely packed, I went upstairs and assembled a pair of valises for us, that we might at least keep dry and comfortable in exile during the American siege. I doubted that they had found my own house in Oxford—

I would have heard, had there been strangers climbing over the walls and loitering out front—but Holmes and I have not made it to our respective ages by making easy assumptions.

Night came. The cook did the washing up and grumbled her way towards bed. The downstairs lights were turned off, then those in the laboratory, and finally the bedroom went dark. All this time, Patrick sat prominently behind the wheel of the Land Rover while the dogs prowled the grounds.

Except that shortly after dark, Patrick's outline in the car was in fact a scarecrow made of stuffed shirts and a hat. Leaving the more obedient of his two dogs to guard the dummy and the car, and the less obedient one inside the house to bark warningly, the three of us set off across the dark landscape.

One advantage of having walked the Downs for the better part of a century—daylight and dark, rain and snow—is that one's feet know the way when one's eyes do not.

We strolled in easy silence over the cropped grass, keeping to the sheep-tracks to reduce the sound of crackling frost. In half an hour, we came out in the roadside car-park near the road to Eastbourne, and Patrick went forward to tap at the window of the Mercedes sedan that waited there.

