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Archie stopped the car and peered through the splattered wind-screen at the scene ahead. It wasn't an encouraging sight. After driving all day, the last thing he needed was for his journey to end in a lane covered in mud and potholes. Okay if you were driving one of those off-road affairs, but not for the old banger that had struggled to get him this far. He switched off the engine and lights and climbed out into the darkness. The rain had stopped but the air was cold. He decided that rather than risk being marooned in the mud, it would be better to abandon the car and his luggage and walk the rest of the way.

After the noise of the city, this was a tranquil sort of place, disturbed only by the occasional small animal making its way through the undergrowth or the hoot of an owl somewhere in the distance. But for most of the time, there was only the soothing sound of water as it trickled its way over the weir on the nearby river. Pausing for a moment to enjoy the peace, he tried to remember how much further there was to go. Perhaps no more than a few hundred yards, but far enough when you had to find your way through mud on a night made dark by heavy cloud.

Progress wasn't easy. Slipping and sliding without anything to hang on to, he just about managed to stay upright until he stuck his foot into the middle of a pothole and cold water shot up his leg. As he teetered about, his mood darkened and he roundly cursed dark country lanes, potholes, hooting owls, the rain, and everything else that was keeping him out of a warm bed on a