

9.

The house in Oxford to which we retreated was in the northern district of the town, a tree-studded neighborhood of large brick houses inhabited by dons and their families. It is close enough to town that a stroll to the Bodleian and Radcliffe libraries, even with an arm full of books, is a pleasant interlude; it is far enough from the centre that the wrangle of bells of a Sunday morning is amusing, not headache-inducing.

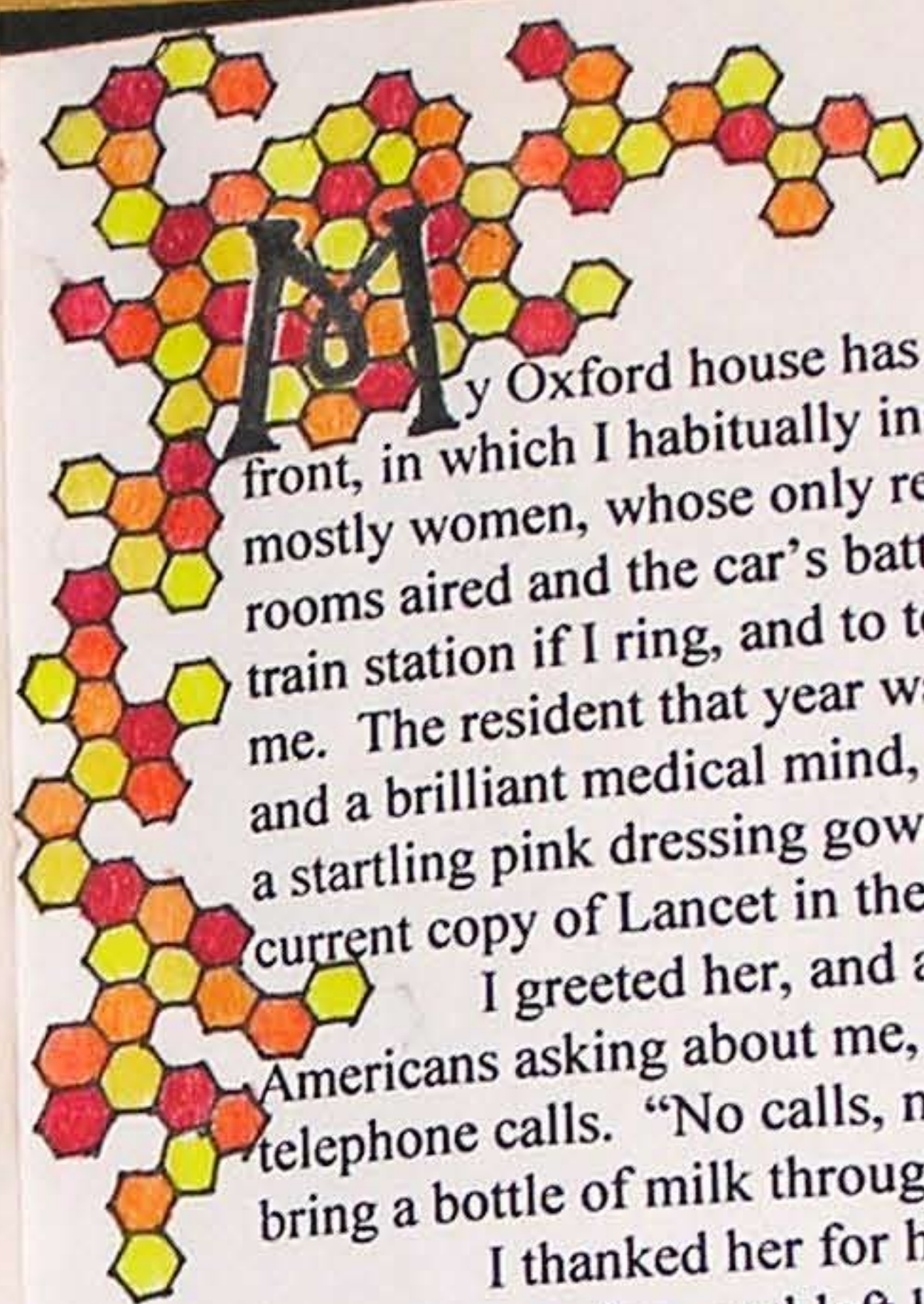
My house is like its fellows from the outside, with high walls on all sides, a spacious gravel drive at the front, and a narrow turret glued onto one corner. The house and its garden are too nondescript for any passer-by to bother with a second glance, and as far as the neighbours are concerned, the owner is an independent older woman who spends much of her live travelling and working on her academic studies, which (it being Oxford) could be Romanian campanology or liver flukes of the upper Nile.

Once upon a time, Holmes had arrived at my student flat through an upper window, setting off an elaborate and circuitous traverse of Oxford's roof-tops in the snow.

Fortunately for us, this time I was permitted to drive through the elaborate and circuitous city roads in the actor's Mercedes.

*Once upon a time...*

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 on 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.

*We were safe...*

*... I thought...*