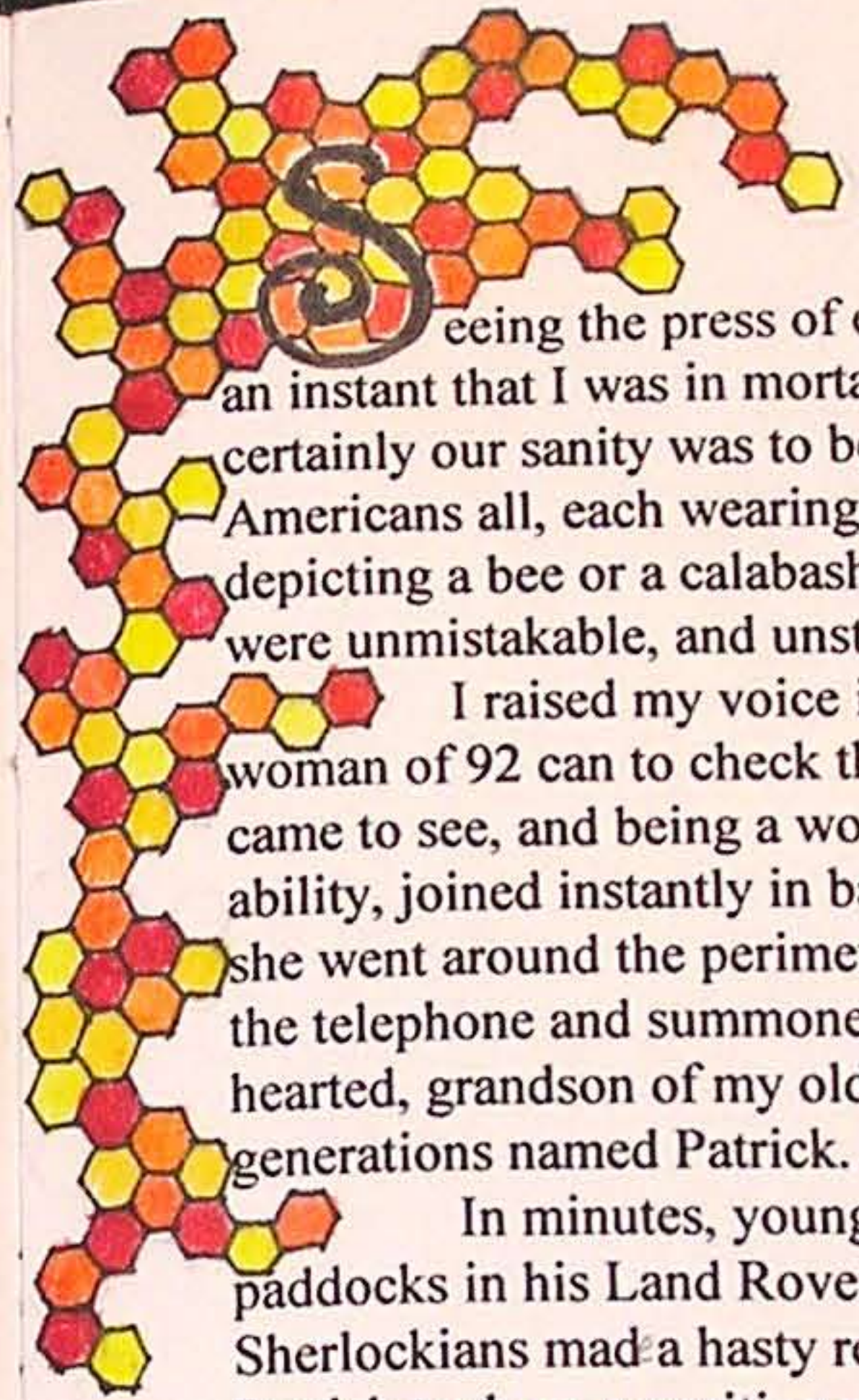


I doubt it will come as a surprise to the reader when I say that my husband's popularity in the world of letters approximates that of a lesser divinity. More than a century ago, when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had an attack of pique and sent Holmes to his death over the Reichenbach Falls, readers protested with black arm-bands, cancelled their subscriptions to The Strand, and outrage to Conan Doyle's face. Were that story to be published now, I should expect Molotov Cocktails to be thrown.

This degree of renown brings, as you might expect, considerable problems. The cooperation of our neighbors is essential, and elaborate ploys are occasionally necessary to turn would-be visitors from our door in Sussex—although we have found that the most effective of these is encouraging the world to think of us as fictional characters. This weeds out all but the overly whimsical and the truly insane and, until one cool spring morning in April of 1992, permitted us to maintain our privacy.

I was in the downstairs sitting room finishing the task of assembling and sealing together the pages of my various memoirs, when my eye was attracted by motion at the window. I looked up, and saw to my horror that our rural home was being invaded, by none other than a pack of Sherlockians.

... I should expect Molotov Cocktails to be thrown.



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 on 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.

*... a bee ...
... a calabash pipe ...
... the address 221B ...*