

## A Monstrous Regiment of Women

Preface by Laurie R. King

The story between these covers is the second I have resuscitated from the bottom of a tin trunk that I received anonymously some years ago. In my editor's introduction to the first, which was given the name *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, I admitted that I had no idea why I had been the recipient of the trunk and its contents. They ranged in value from an emerald necklace to a small worn photograph of a thin, tired-looking young man in a WWI army uniform.

There were other intriguing objects as well: The coin with a hole drilled through it, for example, heavily worn on one side and scratched with the name IAN on the other, must surely tell a story; so, too, the ragged shoelace, carefully wound and knotted, and the short stub of a beeswax candle. But the most amazing thing, even for someone like myself who is no particular Sherlock Holmes scholar, are the manuscripts. *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* told of the early days of a partnership heretofore unknown to the world: that of young Mary Russell and the middle-aged and long-retired Sherlock Holmes.

These literally are manuscripts, handwritten on various kinds of paper. Some of them were easy enough to decipher, but others, two of them in particular, were damned hard work. This present story was the worst. It looked as if it had been rewritten a dozen or more times, with parts of pages torn away, scraps of others inserted, heavy cross-hatching defying all attempts at bringing out the deleted text. This was not, I think, an easy book for Ms. Russell to write.

As I said, I have no idea why this collection was sent to me. I believe, however, that the sender, if not the author herself, may still be alive. Among the letters generated by the publication of *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* was an odd and much-travelled postcard, mailed in Utrecht. It was an old card, with a sepia photograph of a stone bridge over a river, a long flat boat with a man standing at one end holding a pole and a woman in Edwardian dress sitting at the other, and three swans. The back was printed with the caption, Folly Bridge, Oxford. Written on it, in handwriting similar to that of the manuscripts, was my name and address, and beside that the phrase, "More to follow."

I certainly hope so.

—Laurie R. King