

Hard as it is to believe, fifteen years have passed since Ms Laurie King published—under her name—the first volume of the Mary Russell memoirs. She recounts (in her Editor's Preface to that volume, which was given the title *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*) her puzzlement as to what these manuscripts were and why she was the recipient of these multiple volumes of hand-written (for the most part) manuscripts recounting the life of a stranger and, moreover, a stranger who claims to have been married to one Sherlock Holmes.

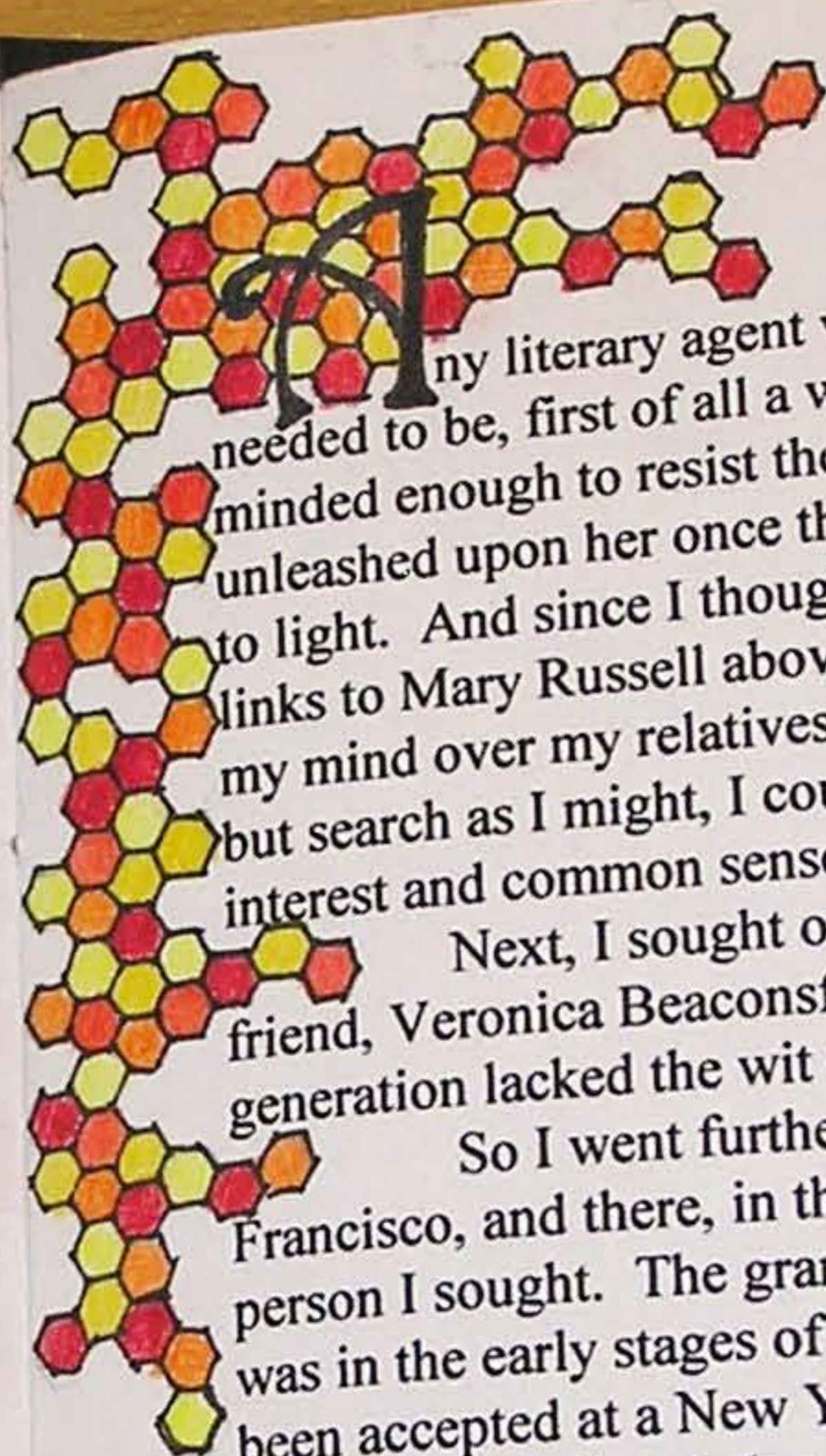
Now, the fifteenth anniversary of the publication of *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, may be as good a time as any to answer that puzzle.

It began in the winter of 1989, when a bout with a troublesome although ultimately meaningless illness left me with an awareness that, in my ninetieth year, I was perhaps not to be immortal. It was time to gather my thoughts for posterity and make some arrangement for their preservation.

I might have done it long before, truth to tell, but for the identity of my husband. When one is married to a person of considerable fame, one tends to choose invisibility over all else. And since any memoirs I was to pass on would be of occasionally inflammatory nature, I needed to choose my literary agent with care.

Little did I realise what that decision would cost me.

*... married to one*



Any literary agent whom I put in charge of my memoirs needed to be, first of all a woman. She needed to be strong-minded enough to resist the blandishments and threats unleashed upon her once the nature of these manuscripts came to light. And since I thought it best to begin with someone with links to Mary Russell above any links to Sherlock Holmes, I cast my mind over my relatives: cousins of various stripe abound, but search as I might, I could find no combination of literary interest and common sense.

Next, I sought out the descendants of my university friend, Veronica Beaconsfield, only to find that the current generation lacked the wit of their grandparents.

So I went further back, to my childhood in San Francisco, and there, in the early weeks of 1992, I found the person I sought. The granddaughter of a childhood friend, she was in the early stages of a literary career—her first novel had been accepted at a New York publisher—but she was also sensible enough to balance the demands of children, travel, a husband with his own career, and a complex household. And an untold benefit: She had a background in Old Testament theology!

Without delay, I began to assemble the manuscripts and prepared to send them off to Ms. King in California—but before I could do so, catastrophe struck.

*... Sherlock Holmes. ...*