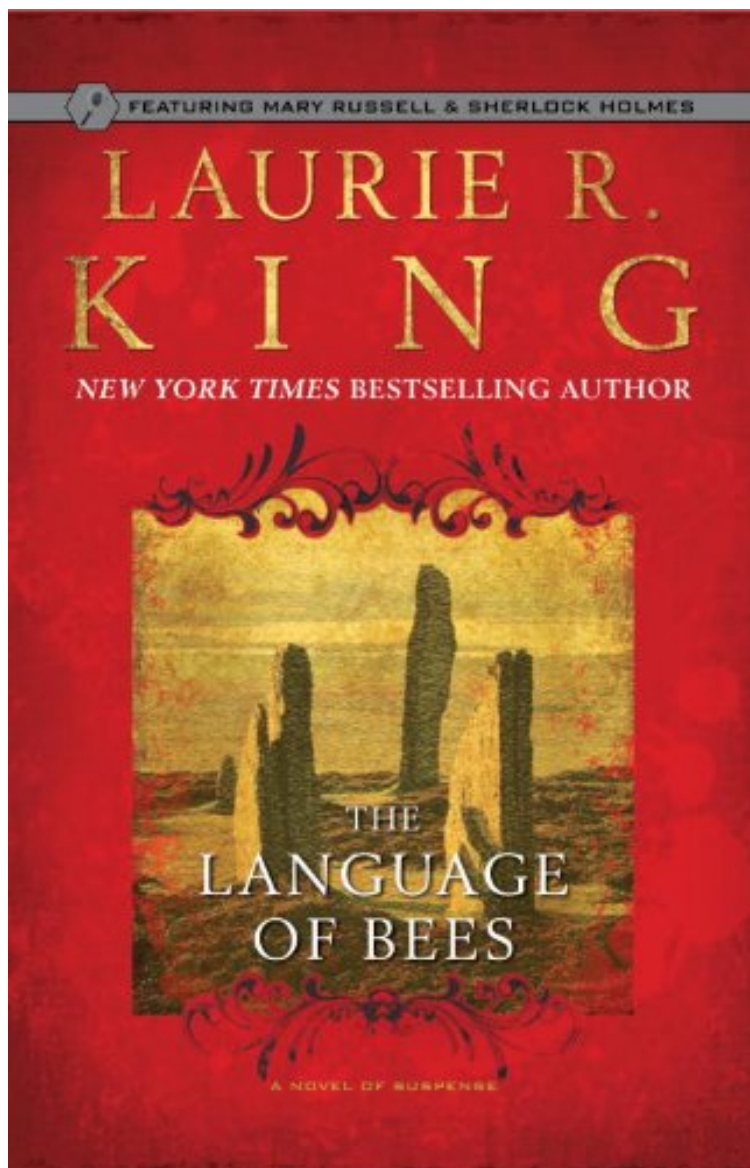


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The Language of Bees: A novel of suspense featuring Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes



Par Laurie R. King
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Par Laurie R. King : The Language of Bees: A novel of suspense featuring Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Language of Bees: A novel of suspense featuring Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Laurie R. King's The God of the Hive and Pirate King.For Mary Russell and her husband, Sherlock Holmes, returning to the Sussex coast after seven months abroad was especially sweet. There was even a mystery to solvethethe unexplained disappearance of an entire colony of bees from one of Holmes beloved hives.But the anticipated sweetness of their homecoming is quickly tempered by a galling memory from the past. Mary had met Damian Adler only once before, when the surrealist painter had been charged withand exonerated frommurder. Now the troubled

young man is enlisting the Holmeses help again, this time in a desperate search for his missing wife and child. Mary has often observed that there are many kinds of madness, and before this case yields its shattering solution she will come into dangerous contact with a fair number of them. From suicides at Stonehenge to the dark secrets of a young woman's past on the streets of Shanghai, Mary will find herself on the trail of a killer more dangerous than any she has ever faced. A killer Sherlock Holmes himself may be protecting for reasons near and dear to his heart.

Chapter One First Birth (1): The boy came into being on a night of celestial alignment, when a comet travelled the firmament and the sky threw forth a million shooting stars to herald his arrival.

Testimony, I: I AS HOMECOMINGS GO, IT WAS NOT AUSPICIOUS. The train was late. Portsmouth sweltered under a fitful breeze. Sherlock Holmes paced up and down, smoking one cigarette after another, his already bleak mood growing darker by the minute. I sat, sinuses swollen with the dregs of a summer cold I had picked up in New York, trying to ignore my partner's mood and my own headache. Patrick, my farm manager, had come to meet the ship with the post, the day's newspapers, and a beaming face; in no time at all the smile was gone, the letters and papers hastily thrust into my hands, and he had vanished. To, he claimed, see what the delay was about. Welcome home. Just as it seemed Holmes was about to fling his coat to the side and set off for home on foot, whistles blew, doors clattered, and the train roused itself from torpor. We boarded, flinging our compartment windows as far open as they would go. Patrick cast a wary glance at Holmes and claimed an acquaintance in the third-class carriage. We removed as many of our outer garments as propriety would allow, and I tore away the first pages of the newspaper to construct a fan, cooling myself with the announcements and the agony column.

Holmes slumped into the seat and reached for his cigarette case yet again. I recognised the symptoms, although I was puzzled as to the cause. Granted, an uneventful week in New York followed by long days at sea, none of our fellow passengers having been thoughtful enough to bleed to death in the captain's cabin, drop dead of a mysterious poison, or vanish over the rails, might cause a man like Holmes to chafe at inactivity, nonetheless, one might imagine that a sea voyage would not be altogether a burden after seven hard-pressed months abroad.* And in any case, we were now headed for home, where his bees, his newspapers, and the home he had created twenty years before awaited him. One might expect a degree of satisfaction, even anticipation; instead, the man was all gloom and cigarettes. I had been married to him for long enough that I did not even consider addressing the conundrum then and there, but said merely, Holmes, if you don't slow down on that tobacco, your lungs will turn to leather. And mine. Would you prefer the papers, or the post? I held out the newspaper, which I had already skimmed while we were waiting, and took the first item on the other stack, a picture postcard from Dr Watson showing a village square in Portugal. To my surprise, Holmes reached past the proffered newspaper and snatched the pile of letters from my lap. Another oddity. In the normal course of events, Holmes was much attached to the daily news. Several dailies, in fact, when he could get them. Over the previous months, he had found it so frustrating to be days, even weeks in arrears of current events (current English events, that is) that one day in northern India, when confronted with a three-week-old Times, he had sworn in disgust and flung the thing onto the fire, declaring, I scarcely leave England before the criminal classes swarm like cockroaches. I cannot bear to hear of their antics. Since then he had stuck to local papers and refused all offers of those from London, or, on the rare occasions he had succumbed to their siren call, he had perused the headlines with the tight-screwed features of a man palpating a wound: fearing the worst but unable to keep his fingers from the injury. Frankly, I had been astonished back in Portsmouth when he hadn't ripped that day's Times out of Patrick's hand. Now, he dug his way into the post like a tunnelling badger, tossing out behind him the occasional remark and snippet of information. Trying to prise conversation out of Sherlock Holmes when he had his teeth into a project would be akin to tapping said preoccupied badger on the shoulder, so I took out my handkerchief and used it, and addressed myself first to the uninspiring view, then to the unread sections of the papers. Some minutes passed, then: Mycroft has no news, my partner and husband grumbled, allowing the single sheet of his brother's ornate calligraphy to drift onto the upholstery beside him. Is he well? I asked. My only reply was the ripping open of the next envelope. On reflection, I decided that the letter would not say if its writer was well or not: True, Mycroft had been very ill the previous winter, but even if he were at death's door, the only reason he would mention the fact in a letter would be if some urgent piece of business made his impending demise a piece of information he thought we needed. Holmes read; I read. He dropped the next letter, a considerably thicker one, on top of Mycroft's, and said in a high and irritated voice, Mrs Hudson spends three pages lamenting that she will not be at home to greet us, two pages giving quite unnecessary details of her friend Mrs Turner's illness that requires her to remain in Surrey, two more pages reassuring us that her young assistant Lulu is more

thancapable, and then in the final paragraph deigns to mention that oneof my hives is going mad. Going mad? What does that mean?He gave an eloquent lift of the fingers to indicate that her informationwas as substantial as the air above, and returned to the post.Now, though, his interest sharpened. He studied the next envelopeclosely, then held it to his nose, drawing in a deep and appreciativebreath.Some wives might have cast a suspicious eye at the fond expressionthat came over his features. I went back to my newspapers.The train rattled, hot wind blew in the window, voices rose and fellfrom the next compartment, but around us, the silence grew thickwith the press of words unsaid and problems unfaced. The two survivingaeroplanes from the American world flight were still in Reykjavk,I noted. And a conference on German war reparations would begin inLondon during the week- end. There had been another raid on BrightYoung Things (including some lesser royals) at a country house gatheringwhere cocaine flowed. Ahbut here was an appropriate interruptionto the heavy silence: I read aloud the latest turn in theLeopold and Loeb sentence hearing, two young men who had murdereda boy to alleviate tedium, and to prove they could.Holmes turned a page.A few minutes later, I tried again. Heres a letter to The Times concerninga Druid suicide at Stonehengeor, no, there was a suicidesomewhere else, and a small riot at Stonehenge. Interesting: I hadntrealised the Druids had staged a return. I wonder what theArchbishop of Canterbury has to say on the matter?He might have been deaf.I shot a glance at the letter that so engrossed him, but did notrecognise either the cream stock or the pinched, antique writing.I set down the newspaper long enough to read first Mrs Hudsonsletter, which I had to admit was more tantalising than informative,then Mycrofts brief missive, but when I reached their end, Holmeswas still frowning at the lengthy epistle from his unknown correspondent.Kicking myself for failing to bring a sufficient number ofbooks from New York, I resumed The Times where, for lack of unreadDruidical Letters to the Editor, or Dispatches from Reykjavk, or evenNews from Northumberland, I was driven to a survey of the adverts:Debenhams sketches delivered the gloomy verdict that I would needmy skirt lengths adjusted again; Thomas Cook offered me educationalcruises to Egypt, Berlin, and an upcoming solar eclipse; theMorris Motors adverts reminded me that it was high time to thinkabout a new motor- car; and the London Pavilion offered me aTechnicolor cowboy adventure called Wanderer in the Wasteland.They are swarming, Holmes said.I looked up from the newsprint to stare first at him, then at thethick document in his hand.Who Ah, I said, struck by enlightenment, or at least, memory. The bees.He cocked an eyebrow at me. You asked what it meant, that thehive had gone mad. It is swarming. The one beside the burial moundin the far field, he added.That letter is from your beekeeper friend, I suggested.By way of response, he handed me the letter.The cramped writing and the motion of the train combined withthe arcane terminology to render the pages somewhat less illuminatingthan the personal adverts in the paper. Over the years I had becometolerably familiar with the language of keeping bees, and hadeven from time to time lent an extra pair of arms to some procedureor other, but this writers interests, and expertise, were far beyondmine. And my nose was too stuffy to detect any odour of honey risingfrom the pages.When I had reached its end, I asked, How does swarming qualifyas madness?You read his letter, he said.I read the words.What did you notHolmes, just tell me.The hive is casting swarms, repeatedly. Under normal circumstances,a hives swarming indicates prosperity, a sign that it can wellafford to lose half its population, but in this case, the hive is hemorrhagingbees. He has cleared the nearby ground, checked for parasitesand pests, added a super, even shifted the hive a short distance. Thepart where he talks about tinnitusque cie et Matris quate cymbala circum?He wanted to warn me that hes hung a couple of bells nearby, thatbeing what Virgil recommends to induce swarms back into a hive.Desperate measures.He does sound a touch embarrassed. And I cannot picture himstanding over the hive clashing Our Ladys cymbals, which is Virgilsnext prescription.Youve had swarms before. When bees swarmfollowing a restlessqueen to freedomit depletes the population of workers. AsHolmes had said, this was no problem early in the season, since theyleft behind their honey and the next generation of pupae. However, Icould see that doing so time and again would be another matter.The last swarm went due north, and ended up attempting to takeover an active hive in the vicars garden.That, I had to agree, was peculiar: Outright theft was pathologicalbehaviour among bees.The combination is extraordinary. Perhaps the colony has somesort of parasite, driving them to madness? he mused.What can you do? I asked, although I still thought it odd that heshould find the behaviour of his insects more engrossing than deadDruids or the evil acts of spoilt young men. Even the drugs problemsshould have caught his attentionthat seemed to have increasedsince the previous summer, I reflected: How long before Holmes waspulled into that problem once again?I may have to kill them, he declared, folding away the letter.Holmes, that seems a trifle extreme, I protested, and only whenhe gave me a curious look did I recall that we were talking about bees,not Young Things or religious

crackpots. You could be right, he said, and went back to his reading. I returned to *The Times*, my eye caught again by the farmers letter demanding that a guard be mounted on Stonehenge at next year's solstice, so as to avoid either riots or the threat of a dramatic suicide. I shook my head and turned the page: When it came to communal behaviour, there were many kinds of madness. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* "A one-woman case for the defense of unauthorized literary sequels...intelligent, witty, complex and atmospheric...By making a woman possible who matches Holmes in brainpower, as well as in depressive tendencies of mind and spare elegance of manner, King has made marriage possible for the most famous and, surely, one of the most aloof detectives of all time....A spellbinding mystery...superb." *The Washington Post Book World* on *Justice Hall* "A wonderful blend of sheer wit and canny ratiocination, this is mystery at its most ingenious." *The Guardian* on *The Art of Detection* "Mesmerizing...King does a wonderful job of probing the human psyche...All of her novels are superb." *Daily American* on *Locked Rooms* From the Hardcover edition.