

Chapter One

London, 1885

James Moriarty was an unhappy man, at least from eight in the morning until eight at night. For the other half of the twenty-four hour span, he counted himself among the most fortunate of his kind. He loved his wife as passionately as he had on the day he'd married her three months ago. He just didn't know if he could live with her.

Not in this house, at any rate. At Angelina's insistence, they'd taken a lease on a four-story terrace in Kensington, a fashionable neighborhood south of Hyde Park. She dove into the monumental task of furnishing and staffing the overlarge abode with gusto. She spent hours away from home, haunting auctions and furniture warehouses. Copies of *Exchange & Mart* scribbled in red pencil littered the house. Even when she paused to drink a cup of tea or nibble a bite of lunch, wallpaper sample books and Cassell's *Household Guide* commanded her full attention.

Natural enough. The home was a woman's proper sphere of action, after all. It surprised Moriarty that his extraordinary wife had taken so well to that traditional role, but what he knew about women wouldn't fill a teacup.

He didn't begrudge her the occupation, but he couldn't share it with her. In fact, she'd banned him from participation after he suggested they paint all the walls the same color — a soothing bluish gray — to save the mental strain of devising a fresh scheme for each floor. He had no contribution to make, other than to shower her project

with funds. This too would be natural enough — except that he had no other sphere.

Sphere? Bah! He couldn't find so much as a quiet corner in which to read his newspapers in the morning with a third cup of tea.

He'd just been evicted from the kitchen by a beetle-browed cook who had scolded him up the stairs with a torrent of agitated French. Moriarty had only identified the testy individual as their cook by his puffy white hat. He had never seen the man before.

Juggling teacup and papers, Moriarty emerged from the staircase into the hall, crossing to enter the back sitting room or morning room. Its designation changed on a daily basis. He hoped it might become a library — possibly even his library. It had one empty bookcase and a nice nook beneath the rear windows where a man might read or write letters. Alas, it still had not yet been supplied with chairs, just crates and odd shapes covered with sheets.

The room at the front of the ground floor was the dining room, easily identified by the large octagonal table that had come with the house. The shape pleased Moriarty. He liked the symmetry of it. He kept that opinion to himself, however. If she knew, she'd probably throw it out. That hadn't happened yet, and the table had its own chairs. He could read his paper there.

He peeked through the door to find the spirit of the house pacing around the table, studying a stupefying array of fabric swatches and wallpaper samples. What kind of deranged society required so many different kinds of wallpaper?

Apparently the choice of paper and drapes was a critical one, capable of determining their entire future lives. Success and failure were invisibly coded in each pattern, most of which Moriarty could barely distinguish. He failed to understand the importance of such decisions. His

inability to see the imaginary future in place of the actual present was a source of continual frustration for his wife.

Angelina spotted him in the doorway and her eyes flashed a warning. “Not in here, James!” Her voice held an edge. Moriarty’s spirits sank. These days her humor depended on whether this green matched that yellow, not on his presence or absence or state of mind.

She would never admit it. They’d argued the housing question at length after returning to London from their extended honeymoon. She’d wanted Mayfair or Belgravia; he’d put his foot down at the expense. He’d suggested Ealing or Bedford Park, respectable new suburbs on the western fringe of the metropolis. She’d crossed her arms and refused to speak to him for a full day.

This end terrace on Bellenden Crescent represented a compromise. Moriarty had not failed to notice that the house was a short walk from Belgravia and a long drive from Bedford Park — typical of their compromises.

“There’s nowhere else to sit.” Moriarty’s heart skipped a beat, as it always did when his gaze lit on her oval face, her russet hair, and her amber-colored eyes. She wore a striped dress of some shiny material, dark blue with a frivolous bow on one hip, accentuating her trim figure. “There are workmen upstairs. They’ve covered everything with sheets. And that fellow in the kitchen chased me off as if I were a recipe thief.”

“Antoine Leclercq,” she snapped. “Our cook. I told you about him.”

“Did you? I forget which is who. There are different people in here every day.” He began edging around the zone of fabrics toward the chairs by the front windows.

She blocked his path. “You can’t lounge around in here this morning. The drapery men will be down to measure as soon as they finish upstairs.”

“They can work around me. I won’t put them off by more than six feet and that only vertically.” He chuckled at his wit.

She was not amused. “Really, James. Do try to cooperate, at least until the worst is done.”

“I only want a place to read my newspaper. Is that too much to ask? You keep telling me I’m a gentleman of leisure. Well, isn’t that what we do? And isn’t a seat by the window in the dining room the logical place to do it?”

She clucked her tongue at him. “Logic has nothing to do with life, as you perfectly well know. Can’t you read the papers at your club?”

Moriarty belonged to the Pythagoras Club, a haven for mathematicians and scientists. He’d never been there during the day. He didn’t even know when they opened the doors. And what would the other men think if they saw him idling about at this hour?

“There are other clubs,” Angelina said, reading his mind as she did so often and so easily. Yet after four months, her interior workings remained as mysterious to him as ever. “White’s, for example.”

“Are we short of money already?”

She shot him a sour look.

White’s was the most exclusive club in London and notorious for gambling. The Moriartys were funding their lavish new life with money he’d won during their honeymoon touring the spas and casinos of Europe. He had never gambled before, but, as a mathematician with a special interest in probability theory, he’d caught on quickly. Simple, really, especially card games. It also helped to have a naturally stoic countenance.

“Surely there’s something interesting going on at the Royal Society.” Angelina spoke in the chipper tone of a mother coaxing a sulky child out-of-doors. That tone always put his back up and he’d been hearing it a lot since they moved into this house.

He hated that tone, but he hated his own futility even more. How many hours could a man spend reading in the libraries at Burlington House? No talks were given in the morning; real scientists worked during the day. Besides, Moriarty had received a chilly welcome at the first meeting he'd attended after they returned to London. The other members remembered all too vividly the turmoil he'd caused last May.

He could go down to the London Athletic Club and take another row on the Thames, but he'd spent three hours doing that yesterday and didn't feel up to it yet. A man's body could only tolerate so much exercise.

"I'll go up and sit in the bedroom," he growled, despising the churlishness in his voice.

"Fine. But don't leave that dirty cup among your clean linens."

The clocks began to chime the quarter hour. There were four smaller clocks, one on each mantelpiece, and a grandfather clock in the hall on the first floor. They kept slightly different times, and their unsynchronized chimes echoed throughout the house. The first chime, a tinny *ting-ting-ting*, started each round from the back half of the upstairs drawing room, followed by this clanking one in the dining room. Then the grandfather clock issued its sonorant bong. The other two small clocks straggled behind in their distinctive voices. The cacophony lasted a full minute and a half. Moriarty had timed it with his pocket watch.

He'd complained about them, but Angelina had dug in her heels. "I love them," she'd claimed. "They're like little bells tinkling in the wind." He'd given up. Marriage, he was learning, meant choosing your battles.

Her attention had already turned back to her samples. Without looking up, she said, "I'm going out in a minute. I'll have lunch near the shops. Antoine will fix something for you. You can eat in the kitchen just this once. And

don't forget we have guests for dinner tonight." She swept out of the room, trailing the scent of gardenia in her wake.

That scent aroused him, as always, but now it also made him a little sad. Did all marriages suffer such rocky starts? He doubted it. The fault lay on his shoulders. She had her proper occupation well in hand. He was the one out of place.

Moriarty crept up the stairs, clutching his rumpled papers to his chest. How had he come to this? He had once been a respected professor of mathematics at Durham University, engaged in the life of the mind, training up young scholars and corresponding with colleagues around the world. He'd been cast out of that life through no fault of his own and managed to re-establish himself in London with a decent, often interesting job at the Patent Office. He'd lived the simple, well-ordered life of a bachelor with two rooms in a quiet house and meals delivered by his landlady on an undeviating schedule. He'd expected to remain in that life for many years to come, if not forever.

Then he'd met Angelina and his world turned upside down. He courted her in his awkward way and, after a few exciting weeks, succeeded in bringing her to the altar. The honeymoon had been pure heaven and profitable as well. They'd been so busy enjoying themselves and discovering one another he hadn't given a thought to the future. Now he had plenty of time to consider his options and was forced to recognize that he hadn't any.

He had amassed too great a fortune to sit in a stuffy office for thirty hours a week or to burden himself with pimply undergraduates, even if there were an institution willing to employ him. The scandal of last May clung to him like a factory reek. He could embark on a course of private study of some kind — if he had a place to sit and work, which he did not.

He'd become superfluous to his own life.

He reached the bedroom at the front of the second floor and flopped into the armchair opposite the unmade bed. The sight of the rumpled covers soothed his temper somewhat, reminding him of those nocturnal hours of happiness, without which he could no longer live. He set his cup on the small table, took a sip of cold tea, and opened *The Times*.

He'd barely read one paragraph when the new housemaids scurried in to make the bed. These were two sisters, brown-haired and rosy-cheeked, fresh from the country, and ignorant as mice. Angelina had rescued them from the household of a lecherous master, a man Moriarty also despised. At least he and his wife had the same enemies. Moriarty applauded her motive in giving these girls a safe harbor and they seemed to be good enough at their jobs. Unfortunately, they were terrified of him despite his best efforts to appear unthreatening.

Now they spotted him lurking behind his newspaper and squealed in unison, clutching their dust cloths to their bosoms.

"Don't worry," he said, rising. "I'll go. I'll go — somewhere."

They backed away from him with eyes wide, as fearful and uncomprehending as if he'd leapt up and cursed at them in Chinese.

They blocked his direct path to the hall, so he sidled past the bed to the interior door, which led into a second bedroom now being used as a dressing room for Angelina. Her wardrobe had expanded by an order of magnitude during the three weeks they'd spent in Paris.

"Lookin' for me?" Peg Barwick, Angelina's Cockney lady's maid, stood in a lake of silks and satins, a measuring tape around her plump shoulders.

Moriarty failed to answer, dazzled by the glossy colors and the overwhelming scent of gardenia.

Peg, as always, supplied her own interpretation. She nodded grimly at the clothes. “It’s that cook. I told her he’d be the death of us, but no, he’s another lost lamb, in trouble through no fault of his own. Which we are all, if you think about it. So now he’s got to live in our house, and we’re all getting fatter. French cooks, I ask you! Where will it end?”

Moriarty scratched his cheek. He had no more voice in the matter of cooks than Peg. At least he got two or three hours of exercise every day to counter the effects. “I don’t know,” he said and went back the way he’d come, to be greeted by another round of shrieks.

A man’s home should be his castle, but this one had been occupied by a superior force. Well, he had money. He could rent an office. He’d find something near those bastions of masculinity, the Inns of Court. He’d stop at Stamford’s bookshop on the way and purchase a Chinese dictionary. He could at least live up — or down — to his housemaids’ expectations.

He grabbed his hat and coat, patting his pockets to make sure he had his notecase, and jogged down the stairs. The knocker boomed three times as he reached the ground floor. More workmen, presumably. He’d let them in on his way out.

He pulled open the front door and tucked his chin in sheer astonishment. Instead of burly laborers in cloth caps, he found three gentlemen in top hats. One was a stranger, but the other two he knew, much better than he would like — Dr. John Watson and Mr. Sherlock Holmes.