

Chapter One

London, 1885

Professor James Moriarty cursed under his breath. He was back in Clocks and Watches, being pushed inexorably toward Switzerland by the flow of the crowd. He should have anticipated this crowd. London only hosted an International Exhibition every few years and they were wildly popular. He should have allowed himself more time, but he'd envisioned something more like an extra-large meeting of the Royal Society, with scholarly men in frock coats and tall hats strolling in an orderly manner from one display to the next.

Today the Exhibition Hall was swamped by a roiling tide of tourists from every corner of England and every country in the world, judging by the *mélange* of accents. Worse, fully half of them were women wearing elaborate, space-consuming costumes in a dazzling array of colors. The towering concoctions they balanced atop their heads contributed to his sense of disorientation, appearing like floral displays that had come adrift from their moorings. They seemed to lure him, like beacons, away from his intended path.

He simply could not get his bearings in this crush. He struggled to open his catalog, then nearly dropped it when all the clocks and watches burst into a cacophony of chimes, announcing the three-quarter hour. Moriarty tucked himself into the lee of a potted palm tall enough to accommodate his six-foot frame and his high silk hat. He pulled out his own pocket watch to verify the time.

Yes, the Swiss had it right. He'd have to reach the Middle Court within fifteen minutes or he'd miss the demonstration. Then he would have cast himself into this moil of humanity for no purpose.

He opened his catalog and found the map. Here was Switzerland, nearly dead center. He must turn full around and bear south-by-southwest to reach Steam Engines and Boilers. He should have brought a compass. The hall had been far easier to navigate late last night, when only a few exhibitors lingered in their booths making last-minute adjustments to their displays.

That's what he had done, although the display he'd adjusted was not his own. He had applied a necessary corrective to the engine being touted by Viscount Nettlefield and his henchmen. His lordship had removed the indicator that revealed how extravagant his machine was of fuel; a crucial fact that the public had a right to know. Moriarty had restored that essential component. Let the truth be shown. Let Nettlefield's spherical engine be judged on its merits.

A troop of Germans streamed past him on both sides, jabbering excitedly and wafting clouds of coconut-scented hair oil. He slipped into their wake and turned south to resume his course, but found his way blocked by a small bit of German flotsam. Moriarty and the child regarded each other in disconcerted silence for a long moment. Then the boy's mouth began to open, doubtless preparatory to some loud emission. Moriarty placed his hand on the tot's oily pate and pivoted him full circle, launching him back toward his own tribe with a light shove.

Another precious minute lost.

He shoved, pulled, twisted, and slipped through gaps in a form of slow motion rugby. At last he gained the Middle Court. He hastened down the central corridor, which was separated from the booths by a long iron railing. Each booth was delimited by burgundy drapes. A sign bearing the title of each exhibit hung over its arched opening. His gaze flicked across each sign, catching a word here and a word there, intent upon his goal.

Ah! Here was the one he sought! The Compact Spherical Engine, offered by Teaberry & Co. The engine sat on one end of a long table in the center of the booth, with a series of electric lamps at the other end. During the demonstration, the engine would light the lamps. Behind the table stood an upright boiler tended by a red-headed man in a tweed suit.

A group of well-dressed persons loitered outside the roped perimeter. Four ladies clustered together, giggling over something in the catalog. They seemed as exotic as hot-house flowers in their brilliant silks; a striking contrast to the iron-gray machinery on display. Five men stood apart from them wearing morning coats, silk hats, and impatient frowns. The tallest of them drew a gold watch from his vest pocket and thumbed it open, scowling.

Lord Nettlefield.

Moriarty paused at the edge of the Telegraph Ship and Vessel display across the aisle, concealed by a large group from Norfolk, and assessed the situation. He hadn't seen Nettlefield in almost a year; not since the incident at Durham University. His lordship hadn't changed a jot. He still dressed with maximum expense, in a manner crassly intended to evoke awe, one supposed. No doubt even his socks were supplied by Savile Row. His pinched features still bore that affected monocle and that smug expression of unwarranted self confidence.

Moriarty noted the smugness with a tight smile. It would soon be transformed into chagrin as the vaunted new machine was proven to be an inefficient steam-hog. His lordship would be humiliated before the world and his wife. All the puffed-up claims about his engine would be deflated.

A small revenge, perhaps, but Moriarty intended to savor it.

He could never repair the damage that had been done in Durham — never — but he could dedicate the tattered shreds of his life to preventing Nettlefield's greed and arrogance from causing the ruination of other innocents. He would obstruct that unscrupulous man in any way that he could.

Now he studied the display as if he were an ordinary attendee, here to learn. The spherical engine had been polished to a fare-thee-well, gleaming dark silver against the red tablecloth. The glass globes of the lamps sparkled in the sunlight streaming down from the high ceiling. But Moriarty realized with a sinking heart that he could barely see his indicator, much less read the fuel consumption diagram. A person would have to be standing directly in front of the engine at the critical moment or his carefully planned lesson would go unnoticed.

Fool! Moriarty cursed himself for a plain, unvarnished idiot. His scheme was too subtle. He should have dug into his pockets and had a larger indicator made, instead of purchasing the customary instrument. But what could he do to remedy the situation at this late hour?

He could think of no alternative: he would have to step out in front of everyone, point to the indicator, and explain its function to the audience. And he'd have to do it soon or Nettlefield would spot the thing and have it removed.

He drew in a deep breath and let it out in a rush. Surely it wouldn't be much worse than giving a paper to the Royal Society. He'd done that numerous times. But he couldn't just barge in, crying, "By gad, let's have a look at that intriguing indicator!" He needed some pretext, some introduction.

He studied the others in Nettlefield's train. The company promoter, Oscar Teaberry, was easily identified. He'd dressed the part, wrapping his apple belly in a garish silk waistcoat, further garnishing himself with a thick gold chain and thick gold rings on chubby fingers. He might as well have wrapped a painted advertisement around his hat.

Two young men in the sober costumes of secretaries stood at the edge of the group, their eyes on their employers. Moriarty knew one of them: Nettlefield's secretary, Mark Ramsay. Another young man dressed in Savile Row elegance with Nettlefield's long chin and angular features hovered possessively behind the women. He must be his lordship's son.

Funny. Moriarty had never thought of Nettlefield as possessing offspring.

Could one of the women be Lady Nettlefield? None of them looked old enough. Three were blonde, pale, and girlish, in sherbet-colored dresses — young Society ladies out for an intellectual excursion. The fourth woman, however, was something altogether different. She stood out from her companions like a tropical orchid in a field of common daisies. Her bronze hair and rich violet costume made the others seem insipid. Her gown had been artfully trimmed to display a stunning figure. Her oval face turned up to smile at Nettlefield's son and then she laughed. The musical sound carried over the general hum and pulled Moriarty forward a step.

She was extraordinary; a paragon. He'd never seen anyone like her.

Moriarty lifted his hat and ran a hand over his bald pate, as if the gesture could restore the hair that had started disappearing at the age of twenty-two. He normally didn't give much thought to his appearance, but he knew the bald pate made him look older than his thirty-four years. Too old for a beautiful young woman to smile up at him like that and treat him to her musical laugh.

He hadn't come to meet women anyway. What a fruitless enterprise that would be! He had a mission and he needed to get on with it. He needed to find a way to intrude himself into that circle.

The fat company promoter spoke to the ladies, who turned as one in his direction. Teaberry bowed toward the Paragon. She raised her gloved hand, allowing him to grasp it and lift it to his lips. At that moment, her other hand slid behind her back and she crossed her fingers just above the ruffles cascading over her bustle.

Moriarty chuckled under his breath. It would seem the lady had mixed feelings about these company men. When Teaberry released her hand, she turned her head to glance behind her, as if to make sure no one had seen her odd gesture. She caught Moriarty's admiring gaze, then astonished him as she touched her lips with her finger and winked.

That wink struck him like a well-aimed dart, shocking him, enchanting him as if it were coated with some special drug. She turned back at once to her companions, but he felt exhilarated. She'd made him complicit in her finger-crossing, whatever it had meant to her. Luck? Or a lie?

The wink gave him courage. He now had an ally of sorts. He walked toward the group, angling his approach to catch Nettlefield's secretary's eye. He extended his hand, saying, "Mr. Ramsay, isn't it? James Moriarty. We've met; I'm sure you remember. Last year, in Durham?"

The secretary blinked rapidly, but his hand rose in automatic courtesy to take Moriarty's. "Of course. Of course, Professor."

He stammered something else, flustered, but Moriarty had already turned to Nettlefield, smiling through clenched teeth, feeling the Paragon's gaze on his back. A glint of fear flashed in his lordship's gray eyes, but quickly hardened to a steely gleam.

Moriarty grabbed the man's hand and shook it heartily. "Lord Nettlefield, we meet again. I expected you'd be here, at the opening demonstration of your latest — ah — project."

"How did you —" Nettlefield sputtered.

"Come to hear about it? 'Twas I who processed your patent application, my lord. I'm an assistant examiner at the Patent Office now. I specialize in generators; chiefly steam, of course,

but the new electrical models as well. These spherical engines are intriguing, I'll grant you, if rather infamously flawed. I'm curious to see how you've solved the problem of leakage."

Without waiting for a response, Moriarty turned on the toe of his polished boot to face the women with an expectant smile. "But we are rudely ignoring these lovely ladies."

"Allow me to do the honors," Ramsay said, predictably. The secretary presented the ladies in rank order. Moriarty touched his hat and murmured the conventional phrases, promptly forgetting the names of the three pale girls.

"And this," Ramsay said, gesturing toward the Paragon, "is Mrs. Angelina Gould, who is visiting from America for the Season."

"Mrs. Gould." Moriarty raised his hat again full off his head this time and bowed. "Enchanted. I hope you are finding your stay in England pleasurable."

Before she could respond, her self-appointed guardian reached a long arm past her. "Reginald Benton, Lord Nettlefield's son."

Moriarty shook the proffered hand, returning the competitive squeeze in full measure. He had rowed for Cambridge; he could give as good as he got.

"Mrs. Gould is my guest," the lordling proclaimed. "This is a private party."

"Don't be so unwelcoming, Mr. Benton." The Paragon spoke in a rich contralto, thrilling even under the flat American vowels. "One can hardly be private in the middle of an International Exhibition of Inventions. Professor Moriarty, is it? What do you profess, if I may ask?"

"Mathematics," Moriarty said. "Although I am no longer affiliated with a university."

"Now he merely dabbles." Nettlefield smirked behind his monocle.

"The most notable mathematicians in history were dabblers." Moriarty met his lordship's hostility with a mild chuckle — the assured expert meeting the bluster of an amateur — and was gratified to catch a flicker of amusement in the Paragon's exquisite amber eyes.

He addressed his next remarks to her alone. "Fortunately, my duties at the Patent Office encourage dabbling. We encounter an astounding variety of inventions, you see, from the revolutionary to the ridiculous."

"I can only imagine," she said. "They're fortunate to have a man of your caliber. Perhaps you would condescend to explain this engine to me, Professor. These silly men think we women have no interest in such matters, but the late Mr. Gould was a mining engineer. I loved to listen to him talk about his work. So many fascinating improvements in machinery and methods! The world is changing before my very eyes. How can I appreciate what I don't understand?"

She'd handed him the excuse he needed — manifestly a woman of exceptional insight. "It would be my pleasure, Madam. Shall we approach or would you feel safer at a distance?"

"On the contrary, Professor." She batted her lashes at him. "I prefer to make my studies from an intimate perspective."

The Honorable Reginald Benton drew in a hissing breath. Moriarty understood: he was being used to put the whelp's nose out of joint. He didn't mind in the slightest. He'd come to perform a similar service for the father, after all.

Mrs. Gould tucked her hand into the crook of his arm, then spoke to one of her companions. "Why don't you join us, Lady Lucy? The professor is honoring us with a lesson."

The girl sidled past Benton with an apologetic smile and took Moriarty's other arm. Now he had two Society beauties while the lordling had none. Moriarty couldn't remember the last time he'd had a lady on his arm. The sensation was pleasurable, yet unreal, as if he were playing a part in a farce. Nevertheless, he would enjoy it while it lasted.

Nettlefield said, "Don't stand there glowering, Reggie. Go make sure he doesn't touch anything. I don't trust him."

Moriarty escorted his charges around the rope cordon and into the booth, where they stopped directly before the engine. The man in tweeds had been watching their approach. He raised his bowler hat and tilted his head. "Please allow me to introduce myself. Ross Bruffin, engineer, at your service."

Moriarty presented the ladies and himself. "Are you the inventor of this engine?"

"I am," Bruffin said, puffing out his chest.

"These ladies would enjoy a tour of your intriguing machine. Perhaps you should do the honors?" Moriarty had no dispute with the engineer. He meant to embarrass Nettlefield's company, not this earnest young man.

Bruffin blushed as red as the coals in his boiler. "Nae, Professor, you're like to do a better job than me. I'll gladly answer your questions, if you have any."

"Very well." Moriarty freed his right arm from the younger girl's hand. "Forgive me, my lady, but I'll need to point at the various components." He patted Mrs. Gould's hand to make sure it stayed right where it was. She rewarded him with a smile.

"These spherical engines are a new development," he said. "They're smaller than most steam engines, which is an advantage on a ship, for example, where space is at a premium. They also operate very smoothly, causing less vibration; another advantage on ships."

"It's very elegant." Mrs. Gould favored Bruffin with a dazzling smile. He blinked as if caught by one of the lamps his engine would soon set alight. "I like the round parts."

"Yes." Moriarty beamed at her as if she had made a profound observation. "They do have an aesthetic appeal. Unfortunately, this type of engine wastes more power, in the form of fuel consumed, than it produces in the form of electricity. Does that make sense to you?"

Mrs. Gould shook her head, causing the arching feathers atop her absurd hat to bob up and down.

"Well, to put it simply, they leak. Steam slips out around the rotors." He leaned forward to point, drawing her with him. "Here, and here. Lost steam means lost power, which means you need more coal. These engines can be very expensive to operate."

"It's only a prototype," Bruffin put in. "I think I've found a solution for yon wee leakage problem. I only need to find the right lubricant and some sort of gasket..."

"Many men have tried," Moriarty said. He was not unsympathetic, but an inventor should recognize the limitations of his own designs. "This indicator here measures steam consumption. Do you see this cylinder with the pencil attached? As the piston moves, the pencil produces a diagram on this bit of pasteboard here." Moriarty smiled at the engineer. "The public has a right to know the facts."

"Your facts," Reginald interjected from behind the rope.

"Facts are the same for one and all." Moriarty was not surprised that Nettlefield had passed his ignorance on to his son.

"Well, they won't learn them from that gadget. You can barely see the blighted diagram."

Moriarty couldn't argue with that. And even if one were close enough to read it, only a specialist would know how to interpret the results. Unless Lord Nettlefield flung his hat to the ground and cried, "Dash it all! We're ruined!" no one would have slightest idea that anything was amiss.

His plan had seemed so sensible from a distance, but in the event, it failed utterly.

His dismay must have shown, because Mrs. Gould squeezed his arm and smiled up at him in the friendliest manner. "I want to know the facts, Professor. I intend to keep my eyes riveted on that indicator and I'll expect a full explanation afterwards." She shot a glance toward Teaberry. "After all, I may be risking my pocketbook on this venture."

Lady Lucy spoke for the first time. "I think this machine looks very dangerous. Listen to the rumbling sound that tall fire box in the back is making! Will that little pencil thingumajiggy keep the engine from blowing up?"

Benton barked a loud scoffing laugh, causing a bright flush to rise in the poor girl's cheeks. Mrs. Gould's eyes flashed daggers at him.

Moriarty said, "Oh, no, my lady. There is no risk, I assure you. Do you see this small structure here?" He pointed at the pressure gauge. "This contains a thin metal plate that rises and falls with the pressure inside the chamber. If the pressure becomes too great, the plate rises up and trips a small lever, opening a valve and safely releasing the excess steam."

Both ladies blinked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Have you ever heard a train whistle?"

Light dawned in both pairs of eyes.

Moriarty let himself get lost in the amber ones for a moment. Then the ladies began peppering him with questions. He answered them one at a time until another man wearing impeccable morning dress with a gray silk hat broke through the milling throng in the corridor. "Ah, good! You haven't started yet."

"Carling!" Nettlefield's lip curled in disdain. "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to open the demonstration."

"A bit early for you, isn't it? I thought you never rose before noon."

The newcomer attempted to look down his nose at Nettlefield, but was too short by several inches. "As the ranking peer on the board of directors, I consider it a duty. And my right."

Nettlefield snorted. "Your duty is to sign your name when asked and go back to your club. Leave the real work to those of us who know something."

"Now, now, your lordships," Teaberry said. He spread his arms to usher the two men toward the booth, but his wide smile and his words were directed at the crowd gathering along the corridor. "Naturally, every member of my board takes an active interest in the company. I wouldn't have it any other way."

"I'll perform the first demonstration." Nettlefield stabbed a finger at his own chest. "I've supervised all the preparations. And I've been here since nine-thirty this morning."

"Stoking the boiler?" Lord Carling sneered. "What difference does it make when you arrived? I'm here now, so I'll do the honors."

Teaberry offered the audience another hearty grin, then turned to speak to Nettlefield in a low voice. "If you wouldn't mind giving way, your lordship. The main thing is to get started. We'll lose the crowd if we delay any longer."

Nettlefield ground his teeth, but conceded. "Fine. But don't ramble on, Carling. And try to get the name of thing right for a change."

"I believe it's time for us to make way, ladies." Moriarty led the women back outside the rope cordon. Lady Lucy stopped beside Reginald Benton. Mrs. Gould kept her hand on Moriarty's arm as he found a spot where they could see the indicator. The effect was stunningly disappointing. He could only hope that over the course of the exhibition, journalists and other engineers would observe the failings of the machine and report it fairly in the press.

“Exciting, isn’t it?” Mrs. Gould’s eyes danced. “I’m far more eager to see this demonstration than I was before you came along, Professor. A lucky stroke, wouldn’t you say?”

“Lucky, indeed.” In spite of the failure of his corrective ploy, he’d never felt luckier in his life.

Ramsay went inside the booth and rang a bell. The crowd fell silent. Lord Carling followed and took up his station behind the engine. The engineer spoke a few low words to him, pointing at the starting lever. Carling uttered a few bland phrases, smiled a large bland smile, and pulled the lever.

A blast of steam rushed out with an ear-splitting shriek, striking him full in the face, burning the flesh right off his skull. Bruffin leapt toward him, crying out as his hands met the boiling steam. He caught the earl as he fell backward and fell with him, both collapsing behind the table.

The engine shattered. People screamed as gouts of super-heated water and shards of hot iron struck their hands and faces. Pandemonium filled the crowded hall.

Moriarty flung an arm around his companion’s shoulders, turning their backs to the deadly shower. He felt a spray of hot drops across his shoulders and pulled the lady in to shelter her.

“God save me,” he breathed. “That wasn’t supposed to happen.”

Chapter Two

All hell broke loose. People screamed and shoved, struggling toward the exits, blocking each other in their confusion. Panic bubbled up in Angelina's throat at each cry of pain that punctured the thunderous roar. Somehow she'd gotten turned away from the blast, but she feared being swept into the roiling mob and crushed against a pillar or knocked to the ground and trampled to death.

Then she felt strong arms encircle her waist and pull her tightly against a solid body. She was lifted off her feet and borne through the press, then hoisted clear off the ground, over the railing and into the booth. Terror rose again when she realized where they were heading toward the table where steam still spewed from the hissing engine.

She screamed, "No! Not this way!"

Professor Moriarty set her on her feet behind the table and pulled her into his chest, wrapping both arms around her, sheltering her. His deep voice murmured into her ear in a soothing cadence. "The steam has found its outlet. It will soon exhaust itself. The danger now is from the mob out there. We are quite safe here. I will keep you safe."

She buried her face in his jacket. The fine wool held the homely, masculine scent of cigar smoke. She inhaled deeply and her heart began to recover a steady rhythm. She lifted her face and smelled Pears soap on his clean-shaven chin. She almost kissed that chin in pure gratitude. She made a small sound, from the sheer relief of standing with a strong man's arms snuggled around her while the world fell apart.

He looked down at her, his brown eyes warm with concern. "Are you hurt?"

She shook her head. "Not at all. Thanks to you." She suspected the flounces over her bustle had taken some damage, but that was nothing; too trivial to mention. Dresses could be repaired.

"Good." He nodded, then patted her back. "Good, good." Their embrace was clearly becoming awkward for him. She released him and stepped back a single pace, retaining a firm grip on his arm. This man was her only rock in a boiling maelstrom. She had no intention of letting him go.

She risked a glance at the corridor where her party had stood awaiting the demonstration. All were gone, swept away by the crowd. The first panic had abated, but not the danger. People pressed against one another now in a slowly-moving mass, panting and moaning, a human tide contained between the iron railings on either side of the corridor. Angelina hoped Lucy and the other ladies had been rescued by someone. Oscar Teaberry would throw them under the stampede to save himself and neither Lord Nettlefield nor Reginald Benton would give others a thought in a time of crisis. Perhaps the secretaries had helped them.

"Don't look," the professor said. "Turn the other way. Breathe slowly and think calm thoughts."

She obeyed him as meekly as a child, balancing on her low-heeled boots as if the planking of the floor might suddenly tilt, like the deck of a ship. She could feel the vibration of the mob through her thin leather soles.

"Can you hold on to the table here?" The professor gently removed her hand from his arm and set it on the table top, as if guiding a blind woman.

She shook her head and cried, "Don't leave me!"

"I won't. I promise. But I need to check on the engineer."

"Oh." She gripped the edge of the table and glanced toward the engine. Mr. Bruffin was huddled against the corner post of the booth, cradling his hands against his chest. They looked

red and blistering and must hurt like the very devil. Beside him lay Lord Carling, whose— *Dear God, the man's face was half gone!* Angelina flinched away with a short scream.

“Don't look.” The professor gathered her into his chest again. “I'm sorry, I should have warned you.” He patted her back again, less clumsily this time.

She wanted him to stay with her, but the poor engineer needed him more. So she composed herself, drawing in a deep breath of his comforting scent. Then she nodded. “I'm all right. Help Mr. Bruffin. I'll stand here and contemplate these lovely lamps.”

“Good girl.” The professor released her, waiting a moment to be sure she could manage alone. Then he turned toward the men behind the engine and let out a grunt of disgust. She focused on the lamps. She'd never seen a glass bulb close up before. It looked almost like a work of art. Surely that delicate creation was too fragile to withstand a current of electrical power.

A rip, a rattle, and a swish of air told her Moriarty had torn down a drape to cover Lord Carling's body. She exhaled a sigh of relief. She could cope with a drape. She half-turned now to watch her savior move on to the next casualty.

The professor stepped past the shrouded figure on the ground and helped the engineer to his feet. “Are you badly hurt?”

“Och, not so bad,” Mr. Bruffin replied. “I've burnt me hands before. I managed to close yon damper. The fire in the boiler will soon be out. I couldna save his lordship. He was gone in the first blast.”

“You were very brave to make the attempt. I'm afraid he's beyond all help now.”

“Poor man.” The engineer sounded mournful. “I dinna ken how this could happen.”

“I'm sure it wasn't your fault,” the professor said. “Are you able to wait for help on your own? I must escort this lady to a safer place.”

“Och, aye, I can wait. The constables will be here as soon as the crowd passes. Go, go! This is no place for a lady.” He leaned against the pillar, scowling unhappily at the ruins of his engine.

Moriarty came back to Angelina and took her by the hand. “Let's go this way. We'll find a quiet spot to wait until the authorities can get in and sort things out.” He led her through an opening created by the torn drapery into a service passage that ran behind the booths. His hand around hers was warm and firm, a sure line of safety. They turned right and soon found another opening that let them into a dining hall. The long room was empty, but all the chairs and tables had been overturned, as if a mighty tide had swept through it.

Angelina smelled coffee — another homely and most welcome aroma. She cocked her head at her rescuer. “Might I offer you a cup of coffee, Sir Lancelot?”

He winced at the title. “You'll think this most frightfully English of me, Mrs. Gould, but I would like nothing so much as a cup of strong tea. Two cups, if I can get them.”

“I'm certain that can be provided.” The kitchens appeared to be behind a service counter along the far wall. “Why don't you find us a couple of unbroken chairs?” She walked briskly behind the counter, glad to be free from the fear of imminent death and gladder to have something to do. The dining hall seemed so ordinary, in spite of the overturned furniture, that her terror evaporated, the way nightmares do soon after you wake up.

The smell of coffee made her feel ravenous. There must be a packet of biscuits back here somewhere, maybe even some freshly baked buns. What time could it be?

She found everything she wanted ready to hand. God bless the English and their ever-present tea! As she assembled a tray with a pot of China Black and smaller pots of sugar and milk, she watched the professor out of the corner of her eye, marveling at the luck that had brought him to her on this terrible day.

Or was it luck? He'd been surveying their group when she'd caught him watching her. She recognized the stance. He'd been studying them, considering the best approach. He'd seen her cross her fingers and that had tipped the balance for him, but she had not been his target. His first barbs had been aimed at Viscount Nettlefield.

There was obviously no love lost between the professor and his lordship. They'd practically snarled at one another when they'd shaken hands. It had something to do with that engine and the thingumajiggy that showed the fuel. What, she had no idea, but the engineer had been unhappy about it too. All in all, there had been a great deal of masculine emotion directed at that curious bit of brass.

Professor Moriarty seemed to hate Lord Nettlefield the way she hated Oscar Teaberry. Interesting, and possibly useful. The quickest way to make a friend was to join forces against a common enemy.

She watched him picking up chairs and testing them for sturdiness, focused on the task like a man who had been sent from the Royal Furniture Office to verify the usability of the seats in the refreshment rooms. He cut a fine figure, tall and straight, with an athletic spring to his movements. He wore a double-breasted jacket and checked trousers of good quality, though a few years out of date. His top hat had been well brushed, before being splattered with hot water, and his boots well polished, though these items were of the everyday variety. No doubt he'd planned to go on to the Patent Office after watching the demonstration. What would he do now?

She could probably keep him with her as long as she wanted. She had hooked him right and proper with that wink, though she hadn't meant to. He'd surprised her into letting down her guard. *Sloppy work, Lina!*

Still, it had gained her an ally. She didn't know how she might use him yet, but she had no intention of letting him go. He was cool in a crisis and seemed a fountain of information. She desperately needed to come up with a fresh approach. She'd been living among Teaberry's toffs for the better part of a month now and hadn't gotten a whiff of her brother's letters.

He found two chairs that met with his approval and placed them beside a table under a tall potted palm that had somehow managed to remain upright. Angelina added a plate of raisin buns to her tray and carried it over. The professor held her chair, stood waiting while she seated herself, and then took the chair opposite.

Lovely manners, the sort one acquired at an early age. She poured tea into both cups and smiled at him. "One lump or two?"

"One, please."

She dropped one lump of sugar into his cup and two into her own. "Milk or lemon?"

"Milk, please." A twitch at the corner of his mouth told her he'd noticed there wasn't any lemon.

Observant, and not without a sense of humor. She liked him. Her father had always scolded her about being too guided by her feelings for the mark, but she thought the sympathy heightened her perceptions. Letting herself be attracted helped put her in tune with her targets. This professor wasn't exactly a mark — she didn't have any particular use for him at the moment — but she couldn't let a man of his qualities go to waste.

Angelina poured a dollop of milk into each cup and handed his across. He held it under his nose, closing his eyes while he inhaled the soothing fragrance. She lifted her own cup and blew across the tea to cool it. They shared a long moment of silence, peaceful even with muted cries still echoing from the glass ceiling thirty feet overhead. Then, without a word, they began

devouring buns and downing hot tea as if they'd just hiked across the Alps on short rations. They finished everything she'd brought in minutes. The professor eyed the empty plate regretfully.

"There are more buns," Angelina said. "Lots. I'll refill the pot while I'm at it."

He was standing with his hand on the back of her chair before she had kicked aside her skirts and gained her feet. A cool head and quick wits. *Careful, Lina! This is no dim-witted Society dude.*

She returned with two more pots of tea and a plate piled high with sandwiches, roast beef with cheddar and watercress with cream cheese. He rose again to hold her chair, then sat and began to eat beef sandwiches. She nibbled at her cheese and cress, watching him from under the fringe of her lashes.

He ate steadily, but without haste, like a man taking a customary meal before catching his daily train. This Professor Moriarty created calm from chaos by his very nature. Yet he was so unassuming in appearance, apart from his height, she would have walked past him at a party or on the street without a second glance.

Although, she had always had a weakness for that combination of a bald head and lush lashes. It signaled maturity tempered by a touch of sweetness. He couldn't be much older than she was, judging by his youthful vigor; surely not more than thirty-five. The perfect age for a woman on the brink of that important boundary. She'd be thirty in one month, though she wouldn't confess that dire fact to anyone but her dresser.

The professor probably thought of himself as stoic and unrevealing, but his brown eyes betrayed his feelings. They'd burned with loathing at Lord Nettlefield, glinted with disdain at Reginald Benton, and twinkled with amusement at Lady Lucy. When he looked at her, she caught the expected flash of admiration along with a shadow of sadness. Not a hint of flirtation, not even when she'd flirted first. She'd bet a tanner he didn't know how the game was played.

He wore one of those school ties, striped in green, blue, and white. Gentlemen cared about such things, so she'd conned her ties. His meant Rugby, which suggested one of the lesser toffs; your titled nobs went to Eton or Harrow. This man's father was most likely a vicar with a private income or a barrister with a lucrative practice.

His neatly-trimmed moustache ended in the whisper of a curl on either side. A touch of vanity; she liked to see that in a man. Vanity gave her an edge, something to work with. His nails were freshly manicured, but his cufflinks didn't match. Bless the lamb! No manservant, then, to air the smoke from his jacket and do up his cuffs. His long fingers were free of rings — no wife either. Her professor was a bachelor.

Good. He'd be free in the evenings.

He wasn't handsome in a conventional way, but she liked his way better. The high dome of his forehead bespoke a formidable intellect. She could imagine him working late into the night, solitary under a single lamp, his pencil racing across pages of calculations.

But his body was so well framed, lean muscles flexing under the well-cut suit. She vividly remembered the sensation of his iron arms pulling her close against his oak-hard chest. Mathematics hadn't sculpted that physique. And there was something about the negligent grace of his posture that made her wonder how fast he could calculate with her sitting on his lap feathering kisses up his neck.

He looked up from his plate and met her gaze, catching a most unladylike spark in her eyes. He blinked, twice. His lips curled in a puzzled smile. She could see the gears start to turn in his powerful brain. Before they could mesh, she asked, "What was supposed to happen?"

Two more blinks. She'd caught him flat-footed. Even so, he didn't stammer and say, *Happen? What the dickens do you mean?* He knew what he'd said and had too much integrity to pretend otherwise.

"Ah." He dabbed at his moustache with his napkin. "I only meant to teach Lord Nettlefield a little lesson. An old grudge-match. Nonsense, really. You'd think we were back in fifth form." He paused. "May I ask how well you are acquainted with the viscount's family?"

"Hardly at all." She put a note of distaste into her voice and got a gleam of approval. "His lordship's aunt, Lady Rochford, has been kind enough to introduce me into London society. She was a friend of my mother's, you see, and when I wrote to her to tell her about poor Victor — he died almost a year ago, you see, and I was so longing for a change of scenery — she suggested I come to London for the Season."

"I see," he said.

She had to press her lips together to keep from grinning at the echo. This fish wanted to jump into her boat, so long as she didn't scare him.

He asked, "Did your mother spend many years in England?"

"Oh! My mother was English, didn't I say that? I am too; or rather, I was born here. I've spent so many years abroad, I've quite lost touch with my native land, and of course my parents are long gone." She lowered her eyes in respect for the dear departed; at least, for her mother. As far as she knew, dear old Dad was still alive and kicking, somewhere in the East End.

"Well," the professor said gravely, "America's loss is our gain."

"You are so kind." She patted his hand lightly. "Everyone has been so kind. I've had the loveliest time! Until today, of course." She bit her lower lip. "I do hope Lady Lucy and the others got home safely."

"I didn't see them," the professor said, "but I have confidence in Mr. Ramsay's abilities."

They traded knowing looks. Lord Nettlefield and son had undoubtedly saved only themselves. "Now you must finish your story, Professor. What lesson did you mean to teach?"

"Ah, yes. It seems a trivial matter now. That engine obviously had much greater flaws than excessive fuel consumption. The patent application came across my desk, naturally. When I noticed Nettlefield's name on the prospectus, I'll confess I gave it extra scrutiny."

"Why?"

"To put it bluntly, I know the man to be capable of cutting corners, whether intentionally or not. With Nettlefield, one never knows if ignorance or cupidity is the driving impetus."

Angelina had to repeat those words in her mind. Then she laughed. "Whether he's stupid or greedy, you mean. How elegant you make it sound!"

Moriarty chuckled. "Please forgive me. I suppose can be a little pompous. I suspected both qualities were in play when I saw the advertisement in the Exhibition catalog. The patent application documented a proper complement of indicators, but some of these were clearly missing from the illustration in the catalog. The company had deliberately omitted essential information about their engine; Nettlefield, again, up to his old tricks."

"I believe Oscar Teaberry is the company director."

"Is he? I thought him merely a promoter. He dresses the part." Moriarty gave her one of his penetrating looks, remembering those crossed fingers. What devil had possessed her?

She brushed an invisible crumb from her blouse, diverting his gaze. Then she met his eyes with an expression of interest. "There was an indicator, though. You took special care to explain it to us."

"Yes, there was. I installed it myself."

“How? Or should I ask, when?”

“Both questions are appropriate. And now, I fear, we embark upon the shameful portion of my tale. I bought a Parallel Motion Indicator from Elliot Brothers, tucked the necessary tools into my pockets, and entered the hall last night under a false pretext. It didn’t take long. My primary intention was to prevent potential investors from wasting their hard-earned money.” Moriarty shook his head and frowned. “Actually, no. My primary intention was to embarrass Lord Nettlefield. A childish prank. I placed everyone at risk and may have caused a man’s death. I can only imagine what you must think of me.”

She estimated that he’d told her about half the truth. For one thing, he hadn’t explained the “old grudge” against Lord Nettlefield. But her story had been a good three-quarters poppycock and fair was fair. She’d get the rest out of him another time.

“That doesn’t sound so terrible to me,” Angelina said. “All you did was restore a missing part. Can an indicator make the engine blow up? Don’t they need them to make sure their machine is working properly?”

“Yes, they do. And no, they shouldn’t alter the engine’s functions. In fact, they’d be useless if they did.”

“Then the explosion couldn’t have been your fault.”

He frowned, not convinced. “I might have loosened a bolt or crimped a valve. I can’t swear that I didn’t. If I caused that accident by my foolery, I must take full responsibility. I’ll must inform the authorities of my actions.”

The police! Had he gone right off his onion? “Oh, no, Professor! You mustn’t. They’ll tie you up for days with questioning, at the very least.”

“But I must know. How can I live with myself?” His eyes were bleak. “Wondering if my conceit led to the violent death of an innocent man?”

His searing self-reproach nagged at her conscience. All this for an indicator? What would she find if she looked into her own heart with such ruthless candor?

Probably nothing but a string of fake pearls and an empty box of chocolates.

“Couldn’t you find out for yourself, if you went back and looked?”

“I suppose I could try.” He sipped his tea while he considered it. Then he smiled at her. “Thank you for the suggestion, Mrs. Gould. I shall make the attempt. After I escort you home, of course.”

She couldn’t let that happen; not today. She couldn’t go back to the Carling household now; she never get away again. She wondered if Lady Lucy would even want her to stay, after her step-father had died so publically and so shockingly. Lady Carling would surely ask her to find somewhere else. Lucy’s invitation to stay with her had been such a lucky stroke.

On the other hand, they might want her to stay and help with things. There would be a raft of cards and flowers and whatnot. She could make her useful and worm her way farther into the bosom of the recently departed earl’s family.

Well, she’d worry about that later. She’d have to go straight on to the meeting at her sister’s flat now and she had no intention of introducing the professor to her family. That would be ticklish even under ordinary circumstances and out of the question in the current crisis. Especially while he was cackling on about talking to the authorities.

She laid her gloved hand on his arm. “That is so terribly kind of you, Professor, but it really isn’t necessary. I’ll simply pop myself into a cab.” She raised a finger to forestall his objection. “No, now, I won’t hear of it. They might clear everything away before you could return and you’ll have no peace until you reassure yourself. But you must promise to call and tell me what

you discover. I'm staying with Lady Lucy at Cheshire House in Mayfair. I'll be in the most dreadful suspense until I hear from you." Angelina leaned toward him, widening her eyes and parting her lips just a trifle.

"I'll find you," the professor said. "I promise."

She had no doubt that he was the kind of man who kept his promises. She beamed at him. She'd landed a brilliant, resourceful ally with one wink and a few cups of tea. It didn't hurt that he was also tall and strong and had dreamy eyelashes.

Now if she could only figure out what to do with him.

Chapter Three

A police constable appeared at the far end of the dining hall and strode toward them. “What are you two doing here? All persons must evacuate the premises. Don’t you know there’s been a serious accident?”

Moriarty explained how they had found refuge in this quiet corner. He handed Mrs. Gould into the constable’s care and watched them walk away, fixing her image in his memory. He was glad she’d made him promise to call on her; otherwise, he never would have. Society ladies were hardly within his sphere. He left a few shillings on the table to pay for their meal and returned to the exhibit.

He spotted two more constables standing guard outside the railing and decided to go farther up the service way and return from the direction of the main entrance. The central walkway was a shambles, strewn with flotsam and jetsam like catalogs, ribbons, even the odd shoe. The iron railing opposite the engine exhibit had been bent inward, its stanchions now tilting at hazardous angles.

Lord Carling’s body had been removed. Mr. Bruffin had also gone, taken to the nearest hospital, he hoped. Drawing a small notebook from his pocket, Moriarty marched briskly up to the nearest guard.

“Good morning, Constable.”

He ducked under the railing and proceeded to the table, his gaze sweeping across the scene. He smelled wet ash and the lingering stench of panic. The spherical chamber of the engine had shattered completely, blowing shards of gray iron all about the booth. The main shaft remained in one piece, though it had broken free of its connections. Water puddled on and around the table and soaked the draperies behind it. Water and something thicker.

Moriarty shuddered. No need to linger on that aspect.

“Here, now.” One of the constables moved toward him, shaking his finger. “You can’t go up there. This whole area’s restricted.”

“I’m with the Patent Office.”

“Oh. I beg your pardon, sir.” The man returned to his post, with an air of guarding him now, as well as the engine.

Moriarty bit back a laugh. He’d had no idea that his place of employment carried such weight. He touched the boiler gingerly — only slightly warm. He drew out his watch and checked the time: 11:42. *Great Scott!* He’d sat drinking tea with Mrs. Gould for the better part of an hour. Some official would surely be coming soon to inspect the situation. He’d best get busy.

But busy doing what? He regarded the scene with dismay. How could he possibly identify the cause of the explosion in this chaos of destruction?

He opened the notebook, drew his pencil from its case, and noted the time at the top of the page. He had to do something to keep the constables from asking questions. He began to examine the main shaft, trying to locate the points at which he had attached his indicator, but his attention was diverted by a trio of men making their way up the corridor.

First came a blond man in a greatcoat and bowler hat. He strode directly toward the two constables, who greeted him deferentially. The second newcomer wore an Ulster coat. He stopped every few paces to study the area around him as if memorizing details. The third man, wearing a black frock coat and top hat, followed him at a little distance, strolling patiently with his hands behind his back, for all the world like a country gentleman out walking with an inquisitive hound.

The first man turned now to frown at Moriarty. “Inspector Gregson, Scotland Yard. I’m in charge of this situation. They tell me you’re from the Patent Office.”

Moriarty had no choice but to brazen it out. He sniffed officiously. “It’s about time, Inspector. I am Professor James Moriarty, Assistant Patent Examiner. I approved the patent for this engine. As you can see, I’ve begun without you.” He displayed his notebook and pencil.

The man in the derby hat slipped under the railing. “The Patent Office, eh? Very diligent of you.” He subjected Moriarty to the same focused scrutiny he’d employed while walking.

Moriarty returned the favor. They stood eye to eye, so the other man must be a little over six feet tall. His lean figure seemed animated with barely contained energy. His dark eyes glittered with intelligence. His face was clean-shaven and sharply sculpted, with a square chin and a hawk-like nose.

“Allow me to introduce myself.” He held out a hand, showing oddly colored stains on his long fingers. His grip was firm, but not aggressive. “I am Sherlock Holmes, consulting detective. This is my associate, Dr. John Watson.” He gestured toward the man in the top hat. “We happened to be at Scotland Yard when the news of this disaster arrived. I was interviewing an inspector who frequents the Isle of Dogs about shipping schedules. The better I understand the commonplace, the more swiftly I can home in on the extraordinary.”

Dr. Watson struggled stiffly under the railing to join them. He pulled a notebook and pen from his pocket and wrote, murmuring his friend’s words under his breath. He was some sort of assistant, then, in spite of his title.

Moriarty had never heard of a consulting detective. It sounded like a puffed-up term for a private inquiry agent.

Holmes continued, “Inspector Gregson here is worried about the possible involvement of Irish terrorists in this incident. He asked me to come along and have a look.”

“Terrorists!” That idea had never entered Moriarty’s mind. “Is that likely?”

“Not probable, but possible,” Holmes said. “If I were a terrorist, this is precisely the opportunity I should choose. Opening day at an International Exhibition would provide the maximum degree of public disruption and strike a blow at our national pride in the presence of throngs of foreign visitors.”

Dr. Watson spoke for the first time. “Thomas Cook’s tours alone bring in some thousands every day.”

“There you are, Professor— Moriarty, was it? Terrorists, however, demand recognition. Since no one has claimed responsibility for this incident, I believe we can safely retire that theory.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Moriarty said, but the talkative fellow had not finished.

“I also have a private client,” Holmes went on. “As we were leaving the Yard, a runner brought me an urgent message from Mr. Oscar Teaberry, whose company is promoting this engine. The victim, Lord Carling, was a member of his board. Another member was also present at the time.”

“Yes,” Moriarty said. “Lord Nettlefield.”

Holmes’s eyes glittered even more brightly, as if he’d scored a point. “Quite so. It was his lordship’s secretary who dispatched the telegram.”

“It’s wonderful how quickly messages can be sent across the metropolis,” Watson said.

“Indeed it is, Watson. The success of my labors often depends upon it.” Holmes raised an eyebrow at Moriarty. “Those gentlemen suspect sabotage by a rival corporation. A hired agent, perhaps. You said you were present at the time of the explosion?”

Moriarty wondered if his name had been mentioned in that telegram. Nettlefield would leap at the chance to do him another ill turn. He wouldn't confess his actions under these dubious circumstances; they might be misconstrued. If Holmes was working for Nettlefield and company, he might well be of the same caliber. He might have specific instructions about where to place the blame.

Moriarty answered, "I didn't say so, but as it happens, I was. It was quite the most appalling thing I've ever seen."

"We needn't dwell on the specific injuries at this time," Holmes said. "Watson here will obtain the coroner's full report as soon as it's available. He served in Afghanistan, you know. Medical officer. Seen everything. Quite unshockable, eh, Watson?"

Moriarty nodded at the doctor to acknowledge his credentials and his service.

Holmes's eyes twinkled. "I see you managed to find a spot of lunch, in spite of the disaster. Sandwiches, if I'm correct. Beef or ham?"

"How the devil could you know that?" Moriarty turned to Dr. Watson, who grinned at him, but said nothing.

Holmes chuckled. "There are a few crumbs of dark bread on your lapel and a dab of mustard just there." He flicked a finger at Moriarty's tie.

The grins on their faces told Moriarty this was meant in the nature of a joke. He chuckled along with them. "Goodness, how untidy of me!" He dusted away the crumbs. "That's quite a clever parlor trick, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes' grin grew teeth. "A trick that has saved our lives on occasion, hasn't it, Watson?"

"Oh, my, yes. More than once."

"Forgive my ignorance," Moriarty said. "I meant no offense. To be honest, I'm a trifle embarrassed. You'll think me the most insensitive brute, but in my effort to escape from the crowd, I found myself in a refreshment room. The smell of coffee made me hungry all of a sudden. I'll confess I helped myself." He hated to lie, but he would not drag Mrs. Gould's name into this unsettling situation.

"Perfectly normal." Dr. Watson nodded genially at him. "A brush with death often has that effect on healthy persons."

Holmes asked, "Did you notice any unusually agitated individuals in the crowd?"

"I don't think so." Moriarty tried, but his memory stopped at the moment he first saw Mrs. Gould. "I can't say I remember anything about the crowd, except that it was a considerable press. I stood at the front, naturally, in my capacity as Patent Office observer. My only interest was the engine."

"Did anyone approach the engine before Lord Carling took his place? Apart from the engineer, I mean."

"Well, yes. I did, as a matter of fact, along with two of the ladies in Lord Nettlefield's party. And his lordship's son. I showed them the indicators and explained how they worked."

"So, you were one of that party?"

"No, I met them here. I had a prior acquaintance with Lord Nettlefield, through the Royal Society." Now he skirted dangerously close to a story he distinctly did not want told. "I noticed his secretary and greeted him. He introduced me to the ladies."

"That seems clear enough. Had you planned to meet Lord Nettlefield here?"

"Of course not." Moriarty smiled blandly into the detective's forceful gaze. "I came to see the engine. These spherical designs are elegant, but rarely effective. I was curious to see if this one might succeed where others have failed."

“Indeed. That’s very helpful. Thank you, Professor. And now we come to the villain of the piece: the engine itself. Were you alone with it long?”

“*Alone* with it?” Moriarty frowned as if puzzled by the turn of phrase. The detective had made a transparent attempt to disconcert him. Such obvious ploys were easily deflected. “I was never alone, as you so oddly put it. The constables were here when I returned from the refreshment room, only a few minutes before you arrived.”

“Then you altered nothing.”

“Of course not. I am careful not to touch anything at all.”

“Admirable restraint! Come, then, Watson, let’s all have a closer look.” They walked around behind the engine to stand where Lord Carling had stood. “Perhaps, Professor, you would do us the favor of explaining the normal functioning of this device.”

“Gladly.” Moriarty joined them behind the table. “Do you know much about how steam engines work?”

“Very little,” Holmes replied.

Dr. Watson chuckled. “I fear my friend’s interests are rather irregular in nature and restricted in scope. He knows a great deal about anything related to criminal acts and next to nothing about else.”

“I am, however, an avid practitioner of the art of observation.” Holmes seemed unabashed by the description of his ignorance.

“The art of the scientist,” Moriarty said. He reprised his lecture on the basic workings of a steam engine, then proceeded to identify the features of interest of this particular model. Holmes asked several astute questions, testing and then surpassing the limits of Moriarty’s knowledge.

At the end, Holmes asked, “How much skill would a saboteur require to effect an explosion?”

Moriarty repressed a wince at that term. Technically, he too was a saboteur, although his intention had been to reveal the function of the engine, not to disrupt it. He managed a bland smile. “Not much, I should think. However, the inventor should be able to answer all of your questions. He didn’t appear to be too badly injured. Perhaps we might arrange a visit?”

Watson agreed. “It would be best to have the engine and the engineer in one place.”

“Preferably in his own workshop,” Moriarty added. “He may have another prototype. Then we could compare the damaged engine with an intact one.”

Watson had accepted his use of the word “we” without demur. Moriarty wanted to follow through with this investigation, at least until he could learn what had happened. He didn’t trust Nettlefield’s minions to understand what they saw or to reach the correct conclusions.

“Capital idea!” Holmes cried. “I’ll have Gregson take this mess into custody, so to speak, until the meeting can be arranged.” He pulled a magnifying glass out of a pocket and began to study the engine shaft, the base, and the shards on the table. He then whirled around to examine the drapery behind the exhibit, scrutinizing the shreds of poor Lord Carling’s flesh.

Moriarty turned away as bile rose in the back of his throat. Watson patted him on the shoulder. “There now, Professor. Don’t be ashamed. I saw worse in Afghanistan and Holmes is utterly cold-blooded by nature. We forget how hard this is for the first-timer.”

“I’m all right.” Moriarty took out his handkerchief and wiped his mouth. He managed a shaky smile. “I’m as anxious as you are to get to the bottom of this.”

“Quite so,” Holmes said. He tucked the glass back into his pocket and drew out a measuring tape. “I notice you have a notebook and pencil at the ready, Professor. Might I impose upon you to jot down a few figures as I call them out?”

“Certainly.” The more he could insert himself into this process, the better.

Moriarty made a quick sketch of the general layout, labelling key elements like the table and the boiler. He listed the measurements on a fresh page. Holmes measured everything from the damaged engine out, moving methodically through the booth. He was as agile as a spider and as intent as a bird of prey. Twice Moriarty saw him stoop swiftly, examine something with his magnifying glass, and then tuck the object into his pocket.

Dr. Watson strolled over to engage Inspector Gregson in conversation, apparently to keep him from interfering.

Holmes and Moriarty worked in harmony for several minutes, until the stub end of the lead fell out of Moriarty’s projecting pencil. “Blast! A moment, Mr. Holmes, if you will.”

“Watson can take over, if you are incapacitated.”

“Not at all.” Moriarty tucked the silver pencil into his breast pocket and withdrew his old wooden stand-by. “No mathematician is ever caught without a spare pencil.”

Holmes had been on his hands and knees inspecting a strew of brass nuts and bolts. Now he sprang to his feet and turned his full attention toward Moriarty. “Ah, so you’re a mathematician as well as a patent examiner. That explains your title, Professor.”

Moriarty merely smiled. Nettlefield already knew his full academic history. Nothing could be gained by hiding it nor could its revelation do him any harm.

Holmes bounded to his side, startling him into taking a step back. Holmes leaned toward him, peering intently at the pencil. “May I?”

Moriarty handed it to him, bemused.

Holmes turned the pencil in his long fingers, studying it carefully. “Number 4, made by Waterlow & Sons. I recognize the maker’s mark.” He handed it back. “I’ve written a monograph on the subject of pencil leads. Do you always use this particular model?”

A monograph on pencil leads? Could this man be entirely sane? “I buy them by the dozen,” Moriarty answered. “The lead is hard enough to hold a sharp point, yet soft enough to make a nice dark line.”

“A considered choice.” Holmes grinned, his eyes shining with satisfaction. Moriarty realized with a jolt that the detective must have found the short pencil he’d employed in the indicator, another No. 4 Waterlow & Sons. What other bits of minutiae might point in his direction?

They returned to their task. When they finished, Holmes restored his instruments to his pockets and went over to speak with the doctor and the police inspector. Moriarty watched them, considering his options.

They probably expected him to hand over his notebook and take his leave, but he wanted to know what would be reported to Nettlefield and Teaberry. He couldn’t know if his name had been mentioned in that telegram; his wisest course was to assume it had been. If it not, this Sherlock Holmes doubtless knew perfectly well there was no such thing as a Patent Office observer. Moriarty had aroused his suspicions by returning to the exhibit.

A mistake, but running away now would only make things worse. He had misrepresented himself. He had lied by omission, failing to mention the hour he’d spent with Mrs. Gould or his brief, harmless conversation with Mr. Bruffin. And he’d lied about the pencil.

Holmes would probably interview the other members of Nettlefield’s party. Mrs. Gould had no reason to conceal either their shared repast or his story about the indicator. He would never ask a lady to lie for him, in any event. That would only spread the stain of his deception over her innocent hands.

No, he had to see this through himself. He must remain abreast of Holmes's inquiry and the best way to accomplish that was to be made an active participant.

He pretended to review his pages of measurements until the inspector walked away and the other gentlemen returned. Then he made his offer. "I could make a fair copy of these notes for you this afternoon, Holmes. I'll send them to you, if you'll provide me with your address."

"Watson and I have had a better idea," Holmes replied. "Would you do us the honor of joining us for supper this evening, Professor? I can promise an adequate meal followed by a rather exceptional port."