CHAPTER 1

It’s not every day you meet four million dollars, and on a rainy October morning I was dressed in my best powder blue suit.

The main hallway of the house was two stories high with stain glass windows one would normally see in a church. The doors themselves were so big they could let in an entire circus, including the train. The French doors at the back of the hall let out onto an expanse of green and well-tended lawn. A leopard dressed in the black uniform of a chauffeur dusted off a maroon Packard convertible. Beyond him were more trees and a greenhouse.

The rest of the place was just as elegant. Lavish chairs that looked like they’d never been used, winding staircases, more stained-glass windows, and paintings. There was more than just a few of those.

One portrait hung below a glass cased military standard that looked to have been through more than one battle. The jaguar wore the full regiment of an army officer who’d served in the Mexican-American war. Though I knew the General was old, I guessed the portrait would most likely be of his grandfather. The jaguar couldn’t have been too far gone in order to have two young daughters.

I was still staring at the portrait when I met the younger of the two. Delicate yet durable, she looked like she’d just walked off the cover of a magazine in her fashionable slacks. The only thing missing was the sign of life in her eyes, though she smiled to show her feline teeth.

“You’re a tall one,” she said. “Blue eyes.”

“It happens.”

From the look on her face, it was clear thinking was not her strong suit. “Pretty dog.”

“Siberian huskies do have that reputation.”

“What’s your name?”

“Sherlock Holmes.”

“That’s a funny name.” Biting her lip in coy fashion, she batted her eyelashes in a way that was supposed to have me rolling on my back, waiting for instructions. Naivety or inexperience, I don’t know which, kept the feline from realizing she was barking up the wrong tree.

“Are you a prizefighter?”

“More along the lines of a sleuth.”

“Are… are you making fun of me?” Her ears didn’t move, but her tail slapped back and forth in anger.

“Most certainly. Now get on with you.”

“You’re just a tease.” The female bit her thumb before sucking on it like a cub. She stayed that way for a while before giggling and slowly turned her back on me. The next thing I knew, she was falling backward, and instinct had me catching her. Had I not, she’d have either cracked her head on the tile floor or more likely twisted around at the last second. As it was, I may as well have been holding onto warm gelatin with how limp her body went. “You’re pretty. So am I.”

The butler came in just in time to see us. The lop-eared rabbit didn’t seem to notice, but the jaguar righted herself and bolted up the stairs.

“The General will see you now.”

Still confused, I asked, “Which daughter was that?”

“The youngest, Bella Coleman, sir.”

“Ever thought of crate training her?”

The rabbit gave me a long-suffering look and repeated his previous statement.