

BELINDA McBRIDE

SIBERIAN

LAST CALL: EUROPE

HUSKY



Changeling Press

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Belinda McBride

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Last Call Europe: Siberian Husky

Belinda McBride

When Plain Jane Genie wanders into the Last Call and casually orders a drink, she doesn't know it's a paranormal bar. She doesn't have a clue her cocktail has a secret code that she's delivering to all interested parties. She just wants to spend her last night in London around music and people instead of staring at the walls in her hotel. As she sips her cocktail, she is stunned to hear a sexy voice whisper, "Let's play..."

Luka and Quentin are shape-shifters, and when Genie crosses their radar, they don't care about her dull clothing or the fact that she seems to be a mundane human. Their Siberian Husky senses tell them that she is much more, and she is exactly what they want. The chase is on, but who catches whom?

Siberian Husky: Catch me if you can!

Chapter One

There was no question in Luka's mind that Quentin Blondin was a stunningly beautiful man. He often spent long moments immersed in the study of his best friend's sculpted features or the lustrous black hair that grew just so. He might even lose himself momentarily in the mysterious depths of Quentin's ebony eyes. But that was all packaging. Quentin was so much more than the beauty of his features.

What made Quentin so dear to Luka was what lay underneath the handsome surface. It was the wild nature, the sly humor, and the sparkling happiness that always accompanied their kind. When he was with Quentin, Luka wasn't ever lonely, nor was he ever bored. He thought of all the years spent with his human foster parents, and while they'd been good to him, they'd never understood Luka the way Quentin did. How could they?

Luka sat alone at their table in the London club called Last Call, and felt the vibrations of music shimmer through his body. The DJ smoothly shifted from a German techno number to a smooth, funky tune. With a sense of relief, Luka slipped foam earplugs from his ears. Quentin might enjoy the dance music, but Luka cherished his delicate hearing. The higher pitches were nearly intolerable, and if he damaged his inner ear and destroyed his sense of balance, his career was as good as over.

"This was a good call, Luka. Last Call for our last night in London."

Quentin slid into the chair across the table, picking up his drink. His erstwhile dance partner gave Luka an appraising glance, and then her eyes flicked across the room. Without looking, Luka scented the vampire she'd just spotted.

Propping his chin on his fist, Luka smiled at his partner; Quentin knew that he'd just let a possible bed partner slip away. "You shouldn't have let go of her hand, Q. The vamp just caught her."

Quentin shrugged an indifferent shoulder, looking around the room. "He's a better choice for her anyway. She wasn't looking for someone like me."

"So what are you looking for tonight?"

"We. We are looking for fun tonight." Quentin grinned at him over the edge of his glass. "I don't want to be sad tonight, my friend. I want to think back on our year in London with happiness."

It had been a good year; they'd taken a year-long contract with the European branch of Cirque du Diable, and it had been an excellent run. A very successful run. The show had been wildly popular. Both men had spent hours under the tutelage of legendary performers, and they'd been offered a substantial raise in pay to sign for a new show in North America. Tomorrow, they would return to Montreal to begin rehearsals.

"Will you miss your Maria much?"

Quentin's eyes held compassion, and for a moment, Luka was confused. Maria. They'd split weeks ago, and he certainly hadn't been grieving for her. Oh, he missed the sex, but not the drama. Maria's temper was simply not to his liking.

"Just remember, Luka, if you'd still been with Maria, she couldn't have come in here."

True, the wards at Last Call would have ensured that the very human Maria Tolomei would have remained on the outside of the exclusive club. That was another reason they'd split; he'd finally told Maria of his true nature, and she'd been less than understanding of the fact that she'd been sleeping with a shape-shifter. She'd tried, but in the end hadn't been able to cross that divide. Her rejection had been another reminder of the loneliness that ate away at him daily.

He stifled a smile as Quentin locked gazes with an attractive blonde. For their last night in London, he wouldn't mind sharing the lovely woman with his best and oldest friend. Sharing was one of the only ways he knew of to alleviate that terrible need he had for his friend. It was a need that Quentin denied, though Luka was certain that the other man returned his feelings. He often caught the younger shifter gazing at him with the faraway look in his eye that spoke of feelings deeper than friendship. He often looked at Quentin with a similar expression on his face.

Quentin rose to approach the blonde then suddenly froze in place. He frowned down at the tabletop and rested his fingers lightly on the polished wood. The expression on his face was intent and curious. "Did you feel that?"

Luka shivered and looked around the room. He felt a subtle vibration through the soles of his feet and the palms of his hands. None of the customers seemed to have noticed the shift in the atmosphere, but the head of security was walking toward the front door of the bar. Had the wards been tested? Was there danger at hand?

He looked up at the specialty bar, where the blonde cat shifter who mixed the drinks had gone still, a puzzled look on her face. She left the bar to meet the beautiful vampire who headed security. They spoke quietly, heads close together. The red-haired woman glanced at the door once again and nodded, retreating to the bar on the raised platform, keeping a close eye on the entrance to the building. It wasn't an emergency, but still, she was on alert.

He glanced over at Quentin. "What do you suppose that was?"

His friend shook his head in puzzlement. "I wish I knew."

* * *

Genie Talison listened to the sound of her steps echoing through the tunnels of the London Underground. It was a rather sad sound, as her feet were dragging just a bit. Today was the last day of her vacation, and then what? She'd return to her grey life in a grey city, and face the necessity of looking for a new job. What should she do this time? Her lack of marketable skills had tied her to the side of an elderly shut-in for the past five years. Before that she'd been a clerk in a large company, and had been deemed obsolete when the company had gone paperless.

Computers tended to do bad things in her presence. Phone systems sputtered and failed, and she'd never been outgoing enough for outside sales. She'd even tried the mailroom for a time, but without direct supervision, Genie had managed to snarl the outgoing mail with the incoming mail, and had triggered a minor meltdown within upper management.

It had been a blessing that the owner of the company had needed an in-home helper for his mother, but a curse as well. She'd been secure, had a home to live in, food to eat and her basic needs had been met. But Genie couldn't put words to the grinding loneliness that had blanketed her existence.

In all, it had been a pretty pathetic life. She had nothing to look forward to at home beyond the next thankless job, the next uncaring taskmaster.

How in hell had this happened?

Mrs. Neeley had finally passed away and left the bulk of her considerable fortune to various charities around the city, and a tidy portion to Genie. There'd been one stipulation in the will.

Genie, I'll leave this to you only if you spend some of it on yourself. I've arranged a trip for you. Take your freedom and never give it away again.

She'd done that, taking an extended journey through Europe, ending up here in London. And frankly, she hated Mrs. Neeley for doing this to her, because after the unprecedented freedom she'd experienced, how could she return to her old life? No answers came to mind. It was silly, in a way. She would have money and freedom, but Genie didn't know what to do with either.

Over the years, she'd lost herself and had become trapped in a twilight limbo: neither living nor dead, free nor enslaved. She'd lost the will to really live.

No, she hadn't lost the will, she'd lost the knowledge. Otherwise, she wouldn't be so afraid.

Genie heard music on the air. Down here in the Tube the musician could be yards away, or in another tunnel completely. There was a whimsical knowledge in that. Sometimes she'd gone wandering in the warren of subway tunnels searching out the strains of music that made the wait just a little more tolerable. She'd rarely found the source of the music, and when she did, she always tipped the musician. It was her own little superstition.

The song that she heard now danced and shimmered and lifted Genie's spirits. It was a Celtic tune being played on the violin; the song gave her the unaccustomed urge to dance. A smile tugged at her lips.

She dug into the pocket of her chinos and pulled out a handful of euros. The coins winked at her dully; she'd have to exchange them once she got to the airport. It was way too much money to tip a street musician, but frankly, the player had earned it. Even here in Europe, she'd had few experiences that had roused her from her apathy.

Rounding a bend in the tunnel, she saw the musician, a lovely young woman with a violin tucked under her chin; the instrument case lay open on the floor at her feet. She had brilliant blonde hair that cascaded down her back in wild curls, and her worn clothing had a romantic, bohemian flair. With a smile, Genie spilled the coins into the case.

“Thank you for brightening my evening.”

The woman smiled and bowed slightly; the music never ceased.

“I wish you the best, miss.” She spoke in a lilting Irish accent. Her eyes dropped closed as she gave herself over to the music. “My wish for you is love and long life, and all the happiness that you’ve been denied.”

Genie shivered at the woman’s words. There was a subtle tension in the air; a sudden surge of energy filled her body. Genie grinned and bowed slightly at the woman.

“In this case, I certainly hope that your wish is my command!”

The woman laughed as Genie walked away, heading for the stairs that carried her out of the Underground, and into the soft light of a London evening.

Across the street, a small sign caught her eye. *Last Call*. Odd, she’d walked past here before and had never noticed the elegant pub with the understated sign. Genie didn’t think about crossing the busy street to the bar. She simply acted, waiting for a break in the traffic, barely remembering to look to the right instead of the left. She hurried to the other side, stepping up onto the sidewalk and standing for a moment in front of the pub. She carefully reached out to touch the handle of the door.

It was stuck, so she pulled. Locked? At this time of day? She let go of the handle and folded her arms, glaring at the glossy black door. She really, really wanted to go inside. She had no idea why; normally Genie would slink away, easily defeated. Now, she wanted in.

Over the noise of traffic, Genie could hear music. A slow, funky beat came to her as a muffled throb. She waited till the song ended, and in that brief pause, she heard the sweet, lyrical tones of a violin. It gave her courage.

Taking a deep breath, Genie stepped back to the door and pulled, nearly falling backwards as it suddenly opened. The music beckoned her onward, and Genie Talison stood up straight, pulled a smile out of nowhere and stepped into Last Call.

* * *

Like most clubs, the lights were dimmed, and couples milled around on the dance floor that dominated the place. She paused, allowing her eyes to adjust to the light. One song blended seamlessly into another; this one was sexy and slow. Couples gravitated together, wrapped in each another’s arms. She thought about taking a seat at one of the vacant tables, but didn’t want

to look like she was angling for a partner. Though if she wasn't, what was she doing here anyway? Her body felt alive and throbbed gently with the beat of the music. Her nipples pebbled, reminding her of the long forgotten potential of her body. For just a moment, she closed her eyes and swayed to the music.

She reached up and clasped the old necklace she wore, drawing some comfort from its weight. Before dying, Mrs. Neeley had dug through her jewelry boxes, finding the tarnished old piece, and had watched anxiously as Genie looped it over her head. She wasn't fond of the necklace, but hadn't taken it off since that day, not even to clean it. For some reason, it gave her comfort to wear the piece. The bass beat of the music seemed to vibrate through the silver that lay cradled in her hand.

Genie looked deeper into the room and saw a raised bar toward the rear. A seat at the bar would be a good compromise; she could enjoy a drink without feeling like a wallflower.

"Last Call for the lady in red. She's having a Devil's Advocate tonight."

To Genie's surprise, the bartender's voice came through the sound system, though she didn't seem to wear a microphone. Her accent was American, east coast. That in itself was a bit of a novelty and Genie felt a nostalgic twinge of homesickness.

She moved closer to the bar, narrowly avoiding a playful couple who'd strayed from the dance floor. She watched in fascination as the blonde behind the bar deftly prepared the cocktail, slipping it to the customer along with an electronic keycard. Genie slid onto a stool, and sent a tentative smile to the stunning red-headed staff member who was seated at the end of the bar, watching her through hooded eyes. Something about the woman made ominous shivers run down Genie's spine. The woman was dangerous and compelling.

Even more fascinating than the bartender's display was the small crowd of men and women gathering at the customer's back. Her erect posture betrayed her knowledge of their presence, and without looking back, she slipped from the stool and headed around the bar to a door. She turned, surveyed the group and nodded at a huge man, who immediately joined her.

Genie could swear that a vapor of smoke rose from the man's ruddy skin. His very essence spoke of dangerous sex and dark delights. She shivered, rubbing her hands up her arms. It was exciting, but not to her taste. Sexually, Genie knew herself to be a bit of a lightweight.

"Can I get something for you?" The bartender leaned on the polished bar, a friendly smile on her face. "Here's a copy of the specialty menu, if you'd like to check it out."

Genie quickly scanned the menu, and then flipped it over. There were sections with silly titles like Vampire and Werewolf.

"Devil's Advocate. Looking for a hot encounter without damnation." She looked at the woman and raised a brow. "This is a sex club?"

The blonde laughed and turned away, wiping a small spill on the spotless bar.

Was that even legal here in the UK? She laughed and tossed the menu to the bar, swiveling back to watch the action on the dance floor. She hadn't been in many clubs before, and certainly never a sex club, but it didn't seem too outrageous. Yes, there was some pretty raunchy dancing going on, and a fair amount of outrageous flirtation, but no one was sprawled out doing the dirty. Not in plain sight, anyway.

"Would you like to order something?" The blonde bartender was clearly holding back a smile, like she knew something that Genie didn't. "It might surprise you, miss. In fact, it might be the best part of your visit to London."

Whatever they were selling, she probably couldn't afford it. At least not until she presented herself at the lawyer's office with proof that she'd followed Mrs. Neeley's will. But still, it sounded... fun.

She shoved her hands into the deep pockets of her trousers and her blunt fingernail clicked on something hard. She pulled it out, and to her surprise, it was a credit card. Genie frowned down at her purse; she always kept her cards safely in her wallet. How had this one gone astray?

It gleamed in the dim light. Was it even hers? She didn't own a platinum card. All of her credit cards had ridiculously low limits. Genie looked closer and saw her name and photo on the face of the card. Perhaps she'd forgotten about it? Before she could puzzle out the mystery, the bartender had whisked the card from her hand and run it through the card reader.

"Well then, what'll it be?"

She plucked the menu from the woman's hands again and glanced at some of the drinks. "Siberian Husky." Cool and tart and sweet all at the same time.

"Good choice."

The bartender busied herself mixing the cranberry juice and the blueberry vodka, adding a splash of soda. When she turned back, she handed Genie the drink, along with a keycard. Genie shivered, but picked up the drink and took a tentative sip. She felt like all eyes in the room were on her. Even over the music, she could tell that the bar had gone oddly still.

"Last Call for the lady in... khaki. Siberian Husky. A brace." She gave Genie a saucy smile. "Double on the house today, miss."

Genie frowned and looked back down at the menu. She was clearly missing something here. *Siberian Husky. Catch me if you can.*

All of the drinks had little phrases after the name. From what she knew of Siberian Huskies, they loved to run and be silly. She took another sip and continued to study the other drinks on the menu.

“Do you want to play?”

She looked up at the whisper, but no one was there. A cool breeze caressed her cheek. She lifted the glass to her lips; the alcohol went down in a cool burn. Nervously, Genie quickly downed the drink. She must be hallucinating. Voices didn't simply carry on the air like that. Especially not voices with sexy, exotic accents. As the cocktail hit her system, her skin flushed, and even her lips began to tingle.

“Come play with us.”

She jerked to the other side. The first voice had been low, and the accent had sounded Russian. This was clearly another person. His accent was different; it sounded French. She sat still, waiting; the alcohol ran through her body, shoring up her nerve. She wanted nothing more than to run for the door, to escape to the safety of the street. Genie gripped the edge of the bar, using it as an anchor for her spinning head and her failing courage.

She sensed a blur of movement, and the keycard was plucked from her hand.

“Catch me if you can!”

Before she could protest, her purse was snatched from her lap. Genie barely saw the streak of blue as the man retreated, and then she spotted him at the door behind the bar.

“Catch me!” He backed up until a second man joined him, her keycard between his fingers.

“Catch us!”

She ran. In all her life, Genie didn't think she'd ever moved so swiftly. The stool tumbled to the floor as she leapt into action; she didn't bother to look back and see where it had fallen. Up the stairs and into a hall, she caught the barest glimpse of movement around corners; streaks of blue and red danced at the edge of her vision. How could anyone move that fast? How had *she* moved so fast?

Laughter echoed down the halls, prompting her to speed up.

“Catch us, pretty one!”

“Stop! Someone stop them! They've got my purse!”

Her money was in it, plus her passport, her hotel key... everything was in her purse! Damn them anyway!

She bolted down a flight of stairs and found herself back in the bar, spotting two dark heads darting through the crowd. Genie paused, caught her breath.

“Stop them! Thieves!”

Genie plunged into the crowd, helped along by the hands of strangers. She nearly caught up to the first one, catching a glimpse of a tight blue tee shirt and laughing blue eyes. Straight black hair spilled down his back. She lunged, grabbed for the hair, and missed by inches as he dove and rolled under a table, coming up on the other side. How had he done that?

A big man snarled at him, and if she'd been thinking clearly, Genie would have screamed at the sight of the man's elongated teeth and bristling hair. But she was focused on catching her clever and very sexy thief. Instead of being afraid, he laughed and vaulted into a cartwheel over the man's shoulders.

She circled the table and then whipped around when someone swatted her ass. This one wore red. She jumped at him, her fingers grasping, and then slipping free of his shirt as he did a back flip, landing on top of a crowded table. She heard laughter all around; the crowd was getting into the whole adventure. He leapt away and vanished into the mass of bodies on the dance floor.

"To your left!"

She turned just in time to see the sleek form of Red Shirt do a series of tumbling rolls across the floor. The one in blue dodged in, planting a noisy kiss on her cheek. "Play with us, pretty!"

Her heart pounded, and Genie panted for breath. Against all reason, she felt her body clench with arousal. She fainted, changing course suddenly, and dodged away, darting up the stairway once again. This time they chased her. She ran through twisting corridors, up a flight of stairs, and then back down another. She was completely turned around, winded, and Genie couldn't remember ever having had so much fun in her entire life!

She took a back hall, ducking behind a bank of curtains as the two men followed, moving with uncanny, *inhuman* grace in her wake. They slowed, and she knew they'd pinpointed her hiding spot.

Not human... not human... The mantra played through her mind with every beat of her heart. No one here was human, not all the way. How in hell had she ended up in a club for paranormals?

The men had paused, and she could see that one in blue was scenting the air. The other was digging through her purse. She stifled a cry of outrage. He'd found her wallet and was peering at her passport.

"Come play with us!"

The man in blue flipped the keycard rapidly between his fingers. He smiled in her direction, and Genie's heart contracted at the sweet, mischievous expression on his face. His icy blue eyes were startling; his long black hair was mussed, long strands hanging down in his eyes. His friend in red smiled and leaned against the wall. His voice was haunting in the empty hallway.

"Catch us, pretty Genie!"

They backed down the hall; the one in blue glanced up at a door, matching the number to the card. He slipped the card into the lock and the door swung open. They looked in, and then as one, looked back at where she peered from the shelter of the curtains.

Their movement was perfectly synchronized. And they looked familiar, incredibly familiar. She'd seen them very recently.

The door began to swing closed, and she knew that if it shut, it would be locked. And with these two, there was no saying how long she'd be out here kicking her heels. Her own hotel key was in that purse! They had her well and truly trapped. She froze for just a second, torn between playing it safe, and... playing. She reached up and cupped a breast, feeling her nipple hard and peaked under the plain cotton of her plain bra. She was going to play.

“Damn you, anyway!” Genie ran, diving at the door, catching it just before it clicked shut.

Chapter Two

It was dark. And empty. God only knew how much she was paying for this room, but with his acute vision, Quentin could see that the space was bare. He'd never been into the back rooms of Last Call before, but knew that they were magically specialized for the needs of the clients. He'd have thought there'd at least have been a bed.

Luka reached out and rested a hand on his shoulder, and Quentin stifled a shiver that ran straight to his groin. How he craved that touch! He composed himself and smiled at his very best friend in the world. The man he loved to the depths of his soul.

Together, he and Luka moved deeper into the room, and he had to fight down the animal. Luka was much better at control than he was. The wild chase had left him aching to shift, desperate to run.

“What is she?”

Luka's light Russian accent was like music to his ears. Quentin shook his head. Truly, he'd nearly collapsed when she'd entered the building. Her power was tightly harnessed, but it had called to him like the song of a siren. One look at Luka's face told him his friend felt the same way.

She was magic, and she was theirs.

When she'd ordered, he and Luka had left their table, moving to the bar in perfect synchronicity. Whatever she wanted, they'd provide it. They were quick enough to cut out all the others, even the werewolves. They weren't going to risk giving her a choice.

The woman wasn't spectacular in appearance; she'd clearly not dressed for a club or for attracting a companion. She wore conservative clothing; her shirt was in muted pastels, and her khaki trousers were as plain and serviceable as her walking shoes. She wore no make-up on her golden skin; her clear green eyes were spectacular without it. Her full, lush lips had no need of enhancement.

Curly dark hair was pulled back in a lumpy knot on the back of her head, and her body... well... that brought a wolfish grin. It was curvy and lush under the frumpy clothing. She probably hated it, but it had him hard. He knew that Luka was reacting the same way. He imagined letting her breasts free, burying his face between them. He wanted to sink his fingers into her plush ass. Her thighs would be soft as they wrapped around his thighs...

He growled.

“Easy, Fido.”

He jabbed Luka with his elbow.

Now that he'd adapted to the absence of light, he looked over at his friend. Luka's face was bright with excitement, and the front of his pants was crowded by his arousal. Luka might play domestic, but he loved the hunt. He grinned at his friend and those ice-blue eyes crinkled happily. Quentin had the oddest notion that if he leaned over and kissed Luka on those smiling lips, that his friend just might kiss him back.

But that would be a bad thing. A working friendship like theirs could be destroyed by the complications of romance. Instead, he winked and looked at the door.

"She's coming."

They moved deeper into the room and then went quiet as the door caught and began to open slowly.

Even as they went still, the light began to rise, and the temperature began to drop. Ah... the room adapted to their needs and wishes. Very strong magic indeed. He dropped to his knees, hiding behind a bank of bushes that suddenly shielded them.

"Hello?" Her accent was American, but she looked exotic and unusual now that her hair was mussed and color had come up in her face.

They peered around the greenery, and Quentin watched in wonder as the room became vast, the roof became the moon and stars, and tall trees grew in abundance.

Home.

Silly, he'd never before visited his ancestral lands, though Luka had described them many times over the years. He heard water trickling over rocks, and birds flitted from branch to branch above them. His skin prickled as the need to shift overtook him. He heard Luka release a shuddering breath, and knew that the other shifter felt as awestruck as he did.

"Go ahead, Q." Luka nodded, and together they fell to all fours, making the smooth transition into their other forms.

Feel better?

Quentin huffed out a breath, watching it fog on the frigid air.

Much.

They hunkered on their bellies behind the bushes; his vision had shifted to tones of grey and black and white. He watched as their quarry moved gingerly across the room, amazement plain on her face.

She suddenly slipped, wobbled dangerously, and then fell to her bottom. The carpeted floor had been converted to a slick sheet of ice, as though a pond had frozen. He shifted slightly, ready to move.

* * *

“Damn!”

Genie gingerly rose to her hands and knees, hoping the soles of her walking shoes would grip the slick ice.

Ice? What in hell was ice doing inside a building? Speaking of which, it really, really didn't seem to be a room anymore. She knew that when she'd stepped through the door her feet had landed on carpet and the temperature had been much warmer. She wrapped her arms around her body and shivered.

Wish I had a sweater.

She glanced down and found a heavy woolen sweater tied around her waist. Jumper, she reminded herself. That's what they called it here.

“Shit.” This was freaking scary, but at the same time, it was just cool. She slipped the garment on and immediately felt better. The next step she took was secure on the slick ice, almost as though the soles of her shoes had changed. She lifted up a foot and grinned at the newly ridged tread on the soles of her shoes. Okay, if she'd known what she was missing, she'd have been looking for places like this long ago! Magic was a good thing.

“So where'd you two go?”

She'd gotten a good look at them there in the hall. Blue Eyes had the Russian accent. He was of medium height, and though he was slender, she'd caught sight of impressive musculature under that blue tee shirt. And the way he'd tucked and rolled under the table? Damn. His black hair was silky and wild; his face was masculine, yet so handsome.

His companion had black hair as well; it was also long and had a wave. His almond-shaped eyes were as dark as jet and set at an oblique angle in his face; his lips were fuller, the planes of his face slightly softer. In all, they were shockingly similar in appearance -- similar build and height, and similar facial features. Red Shirt had an accent that sounded French, but not quite. If not for the accent and the subtle differences in coloring, she'd have assumed they were related. Instead, they were a matched pair.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are...” She spoke in a gentle singsong voice, as though she was coaxing a frightened puppy from the woods.

Genie reached the edge of the ice and stepped into... snow? It hadn't been there a moment ago. Amazing. She spotted her purse lying a few feet from the bushes. She cast a critical eye on the

distance, wondering if it was a trick; she'd reach for the purse and they'd pull it away with a hidden string, or jump out and startle her.

She wouldn't put anything past these two. It brought a grin to her face.

Her hair had tumbled down around her shoulders. The clip that had held it was long gone, and in spite of the chill air, sweat beaded her skin. No sooner had the discomfort registered, than the sweater faded from her body.

Weird.

She bent slowly to the purse, watching the bushes carefully. She'd very nearly reached it when she made eye contact. Blue eyes and brown gleamed in the moonlit night. But those weren't human faces that were looking out at her.

Wolf!

Panic set in, and her brain quickly catalogued all known wolf attacks that she'd ever heard of. Once she realized that she'd never really heard of a wolf attacking a human, she retrieved the purse and straightened up slowly.

Werewolves. She'd seen several downstairs, but hadn't had the sense to be afraid. She took a step back, and they crept slowly from behind the screen of bushes.

Then she laughed. Not wolves, Siberian Huskies!

They were virtual twins of one another; the classic black and white coats sparkled, and their masks gave them a naughty expression. Happy, waving tails arced gently upward. The dog on the left had shocking blue eyes, and a black bar ran down the length of his muzzle. The dog on the right looked softer with his brown eyes and widow's peak.

"No wonder you're such clowns! It's your nature, isn't it?"

She sat on a log that suddenly appeared, grabbing the cheek of the brown-eyed dog, gently shaking him. "Should I say that you two are very bad dogs?" He licked her chin, clearly not taking her seriously at all. The other dog went down on his forelegs, ready to play.

"So you've built a winter wonderland for me here. Show me what you've got!"

They took her at her word, dashing away in a mad, tumbling, mock fight. They rolled across the ice, skidding and scrambling, and then dashed away in a mad race around the perimeter of the pond. Genie laughed at their antics; she felt incredibly privileged to see the canine version of the chase they'd led her on downstairs. They plowed through snow, soared over the bushes, and once again hit the ice, skidding and sliding on their haunches.

Suddenly, they were very human, very naked, and coming her direction! She was caught by the arms and dragged onto the ice between them, twirled and let loose. Genie shrieked as the world spun dizzily around her.

When she came to a stop, she lay on her back laughing breathlessly. She laughed even harder when Brown Eyes straddled her hips, his cock jutting out stiff and hard.

“What? Is it that funny?” He glared down at himself, and then at his friend.

“Perhaps she didn’t expect it to be so... small, Quentin.”

He leaped from her hips to tackle his friend and Genie rolled to her side, laughing till her eyes watered. Small? It was at least the size of a... of a... she couldn’t think of anything to compare it to. A log... Eight inches at least!

Not that she’d seen many erect cocks. In person, that is.

They tumbled across the ice again, and this time Blue Eyes broke away first, skidding in to pull her head into his lap. All in innocence, of course. He stroked her hair and she giggled as his very alert member rubbed along her neck.

“You guys are naked!” She pulled away and sat upright, torn between anger and hysterical laughter. No fear though.

“And you are not.” Brown Eyes smiled at her wolfishly. “I look forward to unwrapping you.”

“Not on your life.” She scooted away, watching as disappointment settled in their eyes.

“But you ordered the drink... you chased with us.” She looked over at Brown Eyes... Quentin. His exotic eyes made her tummy do tumble-y things.

“I didn’t know what I was doing. It was a mistake.” The men looked at each other, then back at her. “Look, guys, I paid for the room already, so why don’t you two just romp around and have fun. I know this is a paranormal bar, and I must have gotten in by accident.”

“The wards here are very powerful. No human could have entered, Genie.”

How’d he know her name? Oh yeah, he’d looked at her driver’s license.

And damn, they were cute.

What would it hurt? One night of no-holds-barred sex with not one, but two adorable shifters...

“Are you like... were-dogs?”

Blue Eyes looked away warily. If she had to guess, she'd say he'd been hurt recently, and her words had brought it back.

"We are shifters, but born, not made like the *oborot* downstairs."

"That's the Russian word for werewolves," Quentin supplied helpfully. "We are much more stable than the weres. Much gentler."

If she had to guess, she'd think they were much naughtier too.

"We grow up as shifters, so we learn how to control our wilder natures during childhood." That was reassuring. She remembered the long teeth and bristling hair of an angered were downstairs. A man like him was a little too much on the wild side for her.

"My ass is cold." She shivered a bit, and it wasn't all from the ice she was sitting on.

Blue Eyes gave her a look that told her he could warm her up.

"Aren't you guys freezing? I mean, being naked and all."

"We flourish in the colder temperatures. It makes us..."

"Frisky?" she supplied, glancing down at the men's thick cocks. Oddly, once she'd mentioned being cold, she began to feel better. Genie glanced down and saw that she was sitting on a pad. She shimmied her bum experimentally and guessed that it was feather-filled. If a pad could manifest, maybe...

"Oh, look, Luka, a bed!"

Chapter Three

Damn. She twisted around to find a beautiful bower on the ice; it sheltered a huge four-poster bed that was shrouded in greenery. As far as beds went, it was probably the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen.

“Wow. Just... wow.” Blue Eyes scrambled to help her as Genie rose from the ice. She did her best to avoid looking at the men's naked bodies, but there they were, bronzed and muscled, their heavy, uncut cocks framed by carefully trimmed nests of curls. She dragged her gaze away and met Luka's smiling blue eyes.

She blushed.

They slipped a bit on the ice, and with a thought it melted away, leaving an expanse of lush green grass underfoot. The birds wheeled above their heads, their songs joyous and sweet. Banks of colorful spring flowers swayed where snow had drifted just moments before.

“How do you suppose they're doing this?”

Luka and Quentin looked at one another and smiled.

“They aren't, Genie. You are.”

“Me? What about you guys? You're the shifters.”

Luka nodded. “The room is responding to you, not us. If I was in control of the room, you'd be as naked as we are.”

“Or at least out of those homely clothes. You are far too beautiful to dress in such poor clothing.”

“What should I be wearing?” She looked down at her outfit. Yes, it was a bit... drab, but really, it was all she had. She'd done most of her shopping through catalogs that came to Mrs. Neeley's house.

Quentin's smile told her all she needed to know, and to her chagrin, Genie was suddenly wearing... nothing.

She shrieked, covering her body, but it was too late. “I didn't do that. I *did not* do that!”

She found herself enfolded between the two shifters. Suddenly she wasn't naked anymore, she was wearing men. Two men.

“Do you like being the soft center of a *Laika* sandwich?” Luka's arms wrapped around her, including Quentin in the embrace.

“*Laika* is Russian for... husky dog, I think.” Quentin looked down, gazing into her eyes.

Actually, Genie rather liked being in the center of the sandwich. In fact, it was the fulfillment of one of her naughtier fantasies, one that recurred in spite of her embarrassment. Behind her, Luka pressed his hips to her ass, his cock a warm, hard column against her cheeks.

In front, Quentin was flush against her body, his hard chest against her breasts, his cock snuggled right there between her legs.

Nice. Naked skin against hers was just nice.

Luka ran his hands down her waist, teasing her breasts along the way. He lowered his head, and his silky hair slipped over her arms as he nuzzled the side of her neck. Quentin kissed her slowly, gently, pausing between embraces to look into her eyes.

“Do you like his kisses?” Wordlessly she nodded, glancing back at Luka. “Would you like me to kiss you?”

Genie didn’t answer; she turned her head, reaching up to stroke the side of his face as his mouth slanted against hers. Stretching back to kiss Luka, she parted slightly from Quentin’s body. He lowered his head and nuzzled against the swell of her breasts. His hips continued to rock gently against hers, and within moments, her juices had drenched his cock.

She wanted to thrust, to capture him within her body, but he backed off slightly. “Too fast, pretty Genie.”

Indeed, Quentin was panting slightly. His chest rose and fell with his breath. He drew away, and from behind, Luka’s cock took his place, thrusting through the wet folds of her labia. He moaned gently and nipped her bottom lip.

“Please,” she whispered.

“Not yet.”

As one, they lifted her to the high, plush bed and followed her onto the soft cotton sheets. At first, they sank slightly into the featherbed, but it quickly firmed up to support their movement.

They thought she was doing this? They were crazy! But it was good crazy. Together they maneuvered her into position. She reclined back against Quentin, and to her chagrin, Luka moved between her raised knees. The only time she’d been in this position before was at the doctor’s office! Her cheeks burned with embarrassment. “Oh, please don’t...”

Genie lost her words. Whatever she was about to say flew straight out of her mind. Luka was dragging his tongue up the inside of her thigh, and to confuse her senses even more, Quentin was kneading her breasts, pausing to roll her nipples between his fingertips.

With wide eyes, she watched Luka move deeper between her legs, and when he finally arrived at her slick, wet curls, she gave a little squeak of dismay.

“Oh! Oh dear... God...” She curled forward at the waist as his tongue worked its way into her folds, gently locating the hard pearl of her clit. Her hips bucked frantically and he backed away.

“Too much?”

She couldn't answer; she mutely nodded her head, unable to look away from him. Luka looked smug as he lowered his face once more; this time, he focused on her opening. Catching the moisture there, his fingers came up to spread her slick juices all over her mons and down between her ass cheeks.

“You aren't... uh... thinking of doing that?”

“No, Genie. Not if you've never done it before.”

“No, no, I haven't.”

“I'll just tease a little then.”

She felt relieved, and yet disappointed. The idea of a double penetration caused another rush of fluid from her body. But he was right; she'd had few sexual encounters in her life, and they hadn't included anal sex.

Quentin licked his fingers and circled her nipples one at a time. His mouth came to her neck, licking and nuzzling over the area that Luka had kissed a few minutes ago. He nipped and pulled, and Genie knew she'd have marks there, but damn if she cared! He sucked her skin at the same time that Luka sucked at her clit, and she gave a strangled cry, her body going tight in orgasm. She bucked and stiffened, and her hands reached, grasping at Quentin's bare leg, the sheets, anything she could hold tightly.

Luka's long fingers curled into her body, teasing the climax into even more convulsions. At last, the spasms ceased and she flopped back against Quentin's body. She panted, feeling sweat slick on her skin. She was wet and slippery between her legs. Genie's entire body trembled in the aftermath.

“Good?” Luka rose to his knees, his cock rigid and dark. Tentatively she reached out and touched, pushing the foreskin back. He hissed in pleasure, arching into her hand. Clear fluid trickled from the eye of his glans, and she caught it with her finger, carrying it up to her lips for a taste. The men watched in fascination, and Genie felt a sense of triumph. In her way, she did have power.

“How are you guys planning on doing this?” She felt silly asking, but it seemed important. Did they flip a coin? Draw straws?

“Quentin is first this time.”

She gave a dubious look at Luka's slick cock. In her opinion, he was about ready to go, but it was his call. However, all thought was swept from her mind as Quentin shifted behind her, pushing her hair away from her neck as he found the sweet spot that no one had ever found before. He kissed and nipped, and that sensitive little area sent awareness rushing through her body once again.

Gently, he moved her forward, rolling her to the side as he did so. She lay on her back looking up at the devastatingly sexy man who was lowering himself to her body. A man she'd first seen barely an hour ago, and had never properly met.

"I'm Genie Talison." She extended her hand and Quentin looked at her in amazement. He solemnly took her offered hand and shook it.

"Quentin Blondin." He glanced up and she craned her neck, looking at the other man.

"Lukas Bernov." He bowed slightly. "It's lovely to meet you, Genie." His eyes twinkled, though he didn't smile. Instead, he moved slightly, making room as Quentin covered her, supporting himself just inches over her body.

"I am so very glad we met, pretty Genie."

"I'm not that pretty."

Quentin lowered his head, capturing her mouth in a lingering kiss. When their lips parted, he stayed close, feathering the skin of her cheek with soft kisses. "I beg to differ." He caught the lobe of her ear in his teeth, worrying it slightly. "You are so very, very pretty with your lovely green eyes and your curling brown hair."

"Beautiful," Luka added. She had only to turn her head slightly to see him at her side, watching avidly.

She wondered if they were lovers. They were so skilled together, so in tune. Quentin moved off to the right, and Luka moved in, capturing her lips. His kiss was more assertive, and she arched back in pleasure, hearing a slight moan as she reached up and ran her nails gently down Quentin's spine. She wanted him now. She was wet and ready, but he persisted with the foreplay, his hands tangling with Luka's as they both touched her body, leaving fiery trails of heat along her skin.

"Please," she whispered. She gently pumped her hips, seeking him, seeking some relief from the mounting need that was swelling in her body. "Please, Quentin!"

Obligingly, he lowered his body between her legs, and she gasped as his rigid cock nestled into her wet folds, sliding easily, but not entering where she needed him so badly. She whimpered, he groaned, and Luka fell backward onto his back, cursing softly. Obviously, watching was a bit more of a turn-on than he'd expected.

“Come on, Quentin!” She angled her hips, coaxing him closer. Unable to resist the lure of her body, Quentin arrowed his cock, notching it at her unexpectedly tight entrance.

The feel of his thick cockhead pressing in was the most amazing, most satisfying sensation she could imagine. She wasn’t a virgin, but she might as well have been; Genie had never experienced anything like this.

When he suddenly pulled back, her eyes flew open wide.

“Condom.” He looked around frantically, looking for where the room might have hidden them.

“Do we need them? I mean, we aren’t the same species.”

Luka was now on his side, his head resting flat on the bed. She reached over and stroked his hair. “It’s respect for you, Genie. No, you won’t get pregnant this time, and we can’t pass disease to you.”

“It’s just good practice.”

“If there’s no fear of pregnancy or disease, and we’ve talked about it…”

She hid a smile as Luka’s bright blue eyes went hot with arousal. She looked back up at Quentin, who looked to Luka. Interesting. Luka was clearly the dominant of the two.

At Luka’s nod, Quentin returned to her body, again pressing, forging his way into her channel. All her life Genie had heard that women didn’t climax with simple penetration. It took only seconds to dispel that myth; as Quentin rocked gently into her body, she came in a clenching, gripping climax. She bucked and surged onto him, finally crying out in uninhibited bliss as he remained hard, filling her channel, moving to meet her every thrust. Her back arched, her toes curled, and Genie found herself panting hard with every thrust, every spasm that rocked her body.

Genie didn’t come down like she normally did; her arousal remained high, though not as urgent. She wrapped her arms around Quentin’s body, glancing over to see Luka watching intently. His cock was hard, rigid, but he didn’t touch it.

She might not be able to accept a full double penetration, but there were other ways they could make love. She stretched an arm out, pulling his head close to hers. They kissed, and his tongue mimicked Quentin’s pistoning strokes into her body. She broke away and looked up at Quentin; his hair hung in sweaty tendrils around his face, and he wasn’t watching her; he was watching Luka. He looked back at Genie and lowered slightly, feathering her lips with light, teasing kisses. He moved away, and Luka moved in to her again. His kiss was more invasive: more teeth, more tongue, and much more force.

She liked it both ways.

“Turn her over, Quentin...”

Quentin rose to his knees, drawing his shaft from her body. The men rolled her over, face down. She was a bit embarrassed when she ended up on hands and knees. Doggy style just seemed a bit... obvious.

When Quentin pressed for entry, she didn't care about the undignified position, and she promptly forgot that every other time she'd had sex in this position, it had hurt.

The man knew what he was doing.

He stroked into her gently, easily, fully aware of the deeper penetration. Once she'd grown accustomed to his length, he sped up his strokes, reaching up to caress her skin with his surprisingly rough hands.

Genie looked over her shoulder, watching his face, his body as he thrust faster. The concentrated look of bliss on his face twisted her belly, and she plunged back harder, urging him on.

She felt a hand in her hair, looked up and found Luka in front of her. Feeling more than a bit clever, she captured his cock with her mouth, just the tip, letting Quentin's rhythm carry all three of them along. Quentin gasped and moaned, and it was contagious; she moaned around Luka's thick cock, and he gasped in response.

Behind her, Quentin was breathing hard. His tempo had grown rough and rapid, and she let Luka slip free of her mouth, afraid that she might hurt him. He pulled back a little, sitting up straight, watching his friend as Quentin gave himself over to ecstasy.

His fingers clutched the soft flesh of her hips, and he pumped wildly, spilling his seed deep into her body, freezing as the spasms locked him in place. His moans continued, turning into soft gasps. When his body collapsed over hers, limp and loose, she let his weight carry them down to the mattress where they lay for long moments.

He rolled to the side, carrying her so that they were spooned together with Quentin curled up against her back.

“I'm sorry, Genie.”

“For what?” She was panting, not sated, not yet.

“I wanted you to come again.”

She gave an incredulous laugh. “I've come twice already, Quentin. I think I've had my quota!” He slipped an arm around her waist and squeezed. “Besides, I don't think I'm done yet.”

He lifted his head, looking over at where Luka sat, looking hungry and wild. He grinned, and she swore she could see gleaming white fangs.

Chapter Four

Luka Bernov could count on his fingers the number of times he'd nearly lost his human form during sex. The first was... well, that first time. She'd been one of the shifters in his pack and in full standing heat. He'd shifted before he could penetrate her body, losing his chance at her to another more experienced male. The second time was right now.

He'd always loved to join Quentin with a woman, always loved to watch. Sometimes he even wished the female wasn't there. But if there was no female, Luka would be denied his own secret fetish. Not the watching, the following.

He loved sliding into a woman who was slick with her juices and Quentin's seed. He loved tasting his friend on her skin, being immersed in their combined scents.

It would be that way now, and indeed, he'd been forcing an iron control on his randy cock all night. But she should be just a woman, another fuck for them to celebrate with. Someone they could walk away from, laughing at the wonderful memory.

Genie was much more than that.

He'd figured out the room; it was a null space, one that a strong magician could shape and bend to his or her will. When he and Quentin had entered, it had been simply a big, empty room. The moment she'd stepped onto the carpet, it had changed. Every thought that had entered her mind had been actualized, and Luka was humbled by the sheer, grandiose beauty she'd created. All the while, she'd been completely unaware of her power.

Who was she really? A tourist as she appeared? Someone with newly awakened power? Not a witch, certainly -- or a psychic. Her power was harnessed, yet natural, and when it finally spilled forth, it would be a grand, beautiful thing to experience. Luka wanted to experience the liberation of Genie.

He'd watched Quentin lose himself in her body and he'd fought down a challenge... a challenge that shouldn't have existed. She wasn't a shifter, not a potential mate to either of them. But Luka's beast wouldn't be stilled. Somehow it knew her and refused to think of walking away in the morning.

Now he sat still and silent, watching the pair recover among the soft cotton sheeting of the bed. The spring panorama had shifted, and it was now full summer. The sun beamed down and the soft fragrance of roses scented the air. Wind whispered through the tops of the trees.

Summer was his favorite time of year.

Luka didn't move, but Genie did, rising to her knees, pushing him to his back with a shy, naughty smile on her face. She straddled his hips and he felt the silk of Quentin's semen slipping from her channel, slick and warm on his skin. He pulled a deep, shaking breath into his lungs and fought for control.

“Now,” he growled, reaching up to grip her at the waist. “Please,” he added.

Wouldn't do to piss her off.

Her eyes went very large and wide, and Genie rose up and forward, letting him guide his cock into place. She lowered herself over his body, engulfing him, drawing a groan from him.

Luka closed his eyes and let the sensations wash over him: her soft fragrance layered with Quentin's musky scent, the slick, silky feel of her channel, and her weight as it rested over his body. She rode him slowly, her hands braced on his chest, her eyes dropping closed as her arousal blossomed once again. He rolled his head and met Quentin's gaze, and then everything shifted, moved into place. They were merely inches apart, and he felt Quentin's breath on his face.

“Kiss him.”

He looked up at Genie in amazement. She hadn't slowed, she rode him in a sensual dance, her long back arched, her hair tumbling over her shoulders. She watched them with a curious intensity.

“Just do it. You know you both want to.”

And he did. He did. He turned his head to Quentin once again, and his friend's eyes were dark and hooded. Was it what he wanted as well?

Luka didn't have time to wonder, for as Genie lowered her body to lie fully over his, Quentin crossed that valley, mere inches, but so far, so very far, and their lips brushed together lightly. He didn't close his eyes; he couldn't, for he had to be certain it wasn't his imagination. He reached up, clasped the back of Quentin's head and buried his fingers into the lush waves of coal black hair. He pulled his friend closer, and kissed him deeply; their tongues met and retreated. Quentin gasped, and then returned, feathering light, drugging kisses over Luka's mouth.

Genie was moving faster, pulling him along now, and his hips thrust up into hers, plunging deep and hard. He wrapped his arms tightly around her hips, taking control, forcing her movement to meet his. The sounds she was making were feral and rough; she struggled against his strength, struggled, but failed to fight back her climax.

As her pelvis thrust against his, she dragged him along. Her face was tight with focus, her sobbing breath testament to her complete abandonment to her body -- to his body. When he knew she was there, he turned his head again, staring into Quentin's eyes as his climax slashed through him like a hurricane. He cried out, where normally he was silent. He let go of Quentin's hair and felt his friend's strong hand in his. He felt the powerful grip of Genie's thighs on his, and he soared.

Even when he came down, Luka knew that his feet would never touch the ground again.

* * *

It was Genie who finally broke the silence.

“So, I think I know you guys.”

They looked at her in surprise. Quentin was to the left; his head was snuggled next to hers on the pillow. Luka was on the right, his head resting on her breast.

“The circus, right? Cirque du Diable. You guys are the flying act. Good and evil.”

“I’m surprised you recognize us; we are heavily costumed for that act.”

She reached up and stroked Luka’s hair. After so many sterile, grey years, these two had brought color to her life, color and excitement. She refused to check the time. She refused to think about the plane that departed London in just hours. Genie wanted this to be forever.

“It’s the way you move together. You and Quentin always seem to be in perfect synchronicity. It’s like you’ve been together for so long that you mirror one another.”

“We have been together for a very long time. I met Luka when we were both very young and hanging around the Cirque in Montreal. We bothered the performers until they began letting us practice with them.”

“I didn’t think your accent sounded completely French. You’re from Canada.”

“Yes. And Luka...”

“Luka must be from Siberia.”

He laughed; a soft puff of breath tickled her sensitive nipple. “I am from Siberia, but mostly grew up in Canada. That’s how I discovered the circus.”

“Did you two run away to join up?”

“No, no, Cirque du Diable has a permanent headquarters. My adopted family simply moved to Montreal, which gave me the opportunity to spend time there. As shifters, the two of us are a good match physically, and we have other gifts many humans lack.”

“We also share a mental connection, particularly when we’re shifted.” Quentin nipped her shoulder lightly. “It helps us communicate while we perform.”

“I thought... After seeing your show, I assumed that you were lovers. I mean, the act is so sexual. But you two...” Should she continue? Would she cause trouble between them? Quentin broke in, interrupting her flow of thought.

“The show you saw is all about the nature of sexuality. I play the white role of innocence, and Luka plays the dark role of seduction. What we do requires a great deal of intimacy and trust. But it’s a performance, Genie.”

Luka had gone very still; even his fingers no longer stroked her skin. Somehow she knew that so very much depended on the next few minutes.

“You weren’t performing when you kissed Luka.”

He froze at that comment. Genie couldn’t see Quentin’s face, but she knew he and Luka were communicating on some level. She might have to leave them behind in a few hours, but perhaps she could help them break the barrier that kept them apart.

“Genie, Luka and I work together. We... if we were lovers, our personal life might come onto the stage with us. If we had a fight, if we were angry, it could endanger us.”

“Or it might make you stronger.”

“How?” Luka whispered.

“You wouldn’t be hiding your emotions from one another. You wouldn’t have to hold back on stage. And frankly, if I’m taking anything away from this night with you, it’s the knowledge that if opportunity... if *love* comes, you should never turn away. What if...” She scooted up so she could see their faces. “What if something did happen. What if you lost one another without ever having tried?”

What if you ended up like me? Grey and sterile. Alone.

“Just think about it. That’s all I’m saying, guys. Just think.”

Luka’s hand slipped from her tummy. It moved up to lie between her breasts, right over her heart. A moment later, Quentin’s hand came up to cover it.

* * *

“Would you like a private performance?”

Luka sat up, leaving her feeling a bit empty on that side. Quentin smiled and rolled away, stepping from the bed. Looking up, he reached toward the ceiling and two long sheets of white silk unfurled from nowhere, fluttering in the air like falling leaves. Genie was suddenly ensconced on a sofa; the entire room was ablaze with the colors of autumn. Leaves were scattered on the ground in drifts of red and gold and green. At the edge of the floor, she spotted an ephemeral doe grazing peacefully, her ears twitching constantly.

The men thought she was doing this, but it wasn’t possible, was it? She reached up and clasped her necklace, looking at the archaic writing on the tarnished face of the pendant.

It had to be the room anticipating their wishes.

Wishes. What was it the woman in the subway had wished for her? Love and happiness? Genie couldn't remember ever being so happy. And love? Well, she was watching it unfold right in front of her eyes as well as in her heart.

The men deftly clasped the silk, securing their feet and hands in the insubstantial folds of fabric. They were aloft and flying within seconds. Strains of music hummed through the air, and the show was similar to the one she'd watched from the audience of an upscale nightclub.

She hadn't told them, but she'd gone to the show several times, fascinated not only by the two beautiful men who performed on the silks, but by the entire show. It had made her feel young and colorful again, excited about the possibilities of life. However, the true draw had been the struggle of good and evil. High above the stage, the men had parried and sparred, approached and repelled one another. The performance had been frightening as they rose high, and then plunged toward the stage, secured only by their grip on the silks.

It had culminated as the men circled one another rapidly, drawing ever closer. The two sheets of silk tangled and twisted together, the black of one winding into the white of the other, until the men had been caught up in the folds of black and white, their bodies flush to each other, their lips brushing, and then clinging in a passionate kiss.

How had they managed to carry that off? How had they performed with such intensity, and yet had never expressed their feelings off stage?

Even as she watched now, their passion was palpable; they performed naked and unadorned, their hair drawn tightly back to reveal their faces. Together they flew low over the ground; the magic of the room sent them soaring on an unseen wind. They performed impossible feats of skill and strength with only the flimsy silk and the magical winds to support them. Their harmony was perfect. Luka reached out, clasping Quentin's hand and they began to twist and spin, drawing closer and closer. Luka released his grip on the silk, and he was in Quentin's strong embrace. His upper body arched back, and it looked ever so much like ballet in the sky, a *pas de deux* between two passionate, primal creatures who truly didn't belong to this world.

Genie cried as they kissed, and knew that this time, for her, they weren't acting. This time they were showing her, and each other, their deepest needs, their truest feelings. The wind that had carried them began to falter, and the empty silk crumbled to the floor in a pool of blinding white, looking like a drift of snow.

Gently, Quentin and Luka touched the ground without ever having broken their kiss. As they landed, their arms twined around one another, and Genie knew that someone's wish had been granted.

Something cold touched her bare arm. She looked up and she smiled into snow that fell from the magical sky. They'd come full circle. When the two men faded into a pair of black and white huskies, she laughed, watching them disappear into the silvery darkness.

Chapter Five

The men slept soundly, twined together in the pristine white bedding. They'd had a mad dash around the room; the chill air had energized them again, and they'd tumbled into the bed, pulling Genie into their lovemaking.

But she wasn't ignorant of the fact that this time was for Quentin and Luka. She was only there to make it easier.

They'd played experimentally with one another. Tentative touches had led to slow, erotic exploration. Genie had taken their hands and guided them to one another's bodies, smiling as she urged them closer, until their rigid cocks had touched, brushed and jerked in reaction to one another. Her own arousal was overwhelming, and to her gratitude, they hadn't forgotten her in their newfound passion. They'd turned to her, taking turns touching and stroking her skin, finally pushing Genie flat to the mattress, bringing her to orgasm with hands, mouths and finally with their cocks, one right after another.

Now, she lay stretched on her side and watched them sleep. Luka stirred, reached out and buried a hand in the deep waves of Quentin's hair. He sighed and settled back into slumber. She didn't know the time, but suspected it was near dawn.

"Quentin," she whispered. He stirred slightly, finally opening sleepy eyes. "I have to go soon."

"No..." He sat up a bit, leaning back on his hands. Luka grumbled and tossed in his sleep.

"You two need to be with each other now. Do you understand?"

The young shifter looked at her, and then down at where Luka dozed. She reached up and clasped the heavy pendant around her neck. When had it grown so heavy? From the day she'd first put it on, it had become such a part of her, but now it felt nearly alive. She dropped it against her bare skin.

How funny, that they were all here on the bed, naked and completely unashamed. She glanced down at herself and took in the curves, her full breasts and rounded hips. It was the sort of body that never went out of style, no matter how thin the celebrities of the day were. Her legs were long and shapely, and a lock of wavy hair curved down over her breast.

For the first time in ages, Genie suddenly realized that she was beautiful.

From the look in his eyes, Quentin saw it as well.

"You want me to make love to him?" His gaze flicked to Luka, and though his expression was a bit apprehensive, his shaft began to thicken.

"Yes, I want the two of you to make love."

“While you watch?”

It would be agonizing, but that’s what she wanted. She nodded and crawled to the foot of the bed, sitting against the footboard. A soft, silky robe settled over her skin, keeping the chill at bay. She looked around and saw that it was snowing, but the canopy above their heads kept them dry.

She watched as Quentin bent to Luka and woke him with a kiss. Blue eyes opened in surprise, and then delight. He didn’t even look for her; his entire focus was on Quentin. Genie’s eyes pricked with tears. They didn’t seem to know she was here... Had she wished herself invisible?

How long had they been in love? How long had they been pining for one another? Luka’s hand came up, stroked Quentin’s muscular chest, lingering over his dark nipples. When Luka bent slightly to nip at his partner’s chest, Genie’s channel clenched, she slid a hand between her thighs, feeling the slick juices beginning to gather.

The men twisted and rolled. Luka was on top, his hips pressed to Quentin’s, his torso slightly raised as he watched the other shifter’s reactions. He braced his hands to the side of Quentin’s head and lowered for a deep, devastating kiss. They grew wild and a little desperate, hands fumbling, legs tangling, and once again they shifted position. This time Quentin pinned Luka on his belly. He straddled his hips, leaning down to nip and bite Luka’s lightly tanned skin.

Luka’s ass flexed, and somehow, Genie didn’t think he’d let this battle for dominance go so easily. Quentin rose to his knees. His cock trailed along the smooth skin of Luka’s back, teasing and tempting the other man. The threat was clear. He laid fully on top of Luka then, his hips thrusting at the muscled perfection of the other man’s ass. Luka struggled a bit, and then went still, his breathing harsh and loud as Quentin explored the body that he’d so long denied himself.

They didn’t speak; there were no endearments or exchanges. They simply fought a silent battle. As Genie watched, the power shifted again. Luka struggled, breaking free of Quentin’s hold, and slowly wrestled his way to his side, and then to his back. Once he had leverage, he began a slow, agonizing journey to the top, forcing Quentin to his back, compelling the other to accept his advances, to acknowledge his domination.

Quentin gave what could only be called a whimper as Luka trapped their shafts between their bodies. They lay like that, and with a sigh, Quentin submitted.

Luka came up, suddenly releasing his grip on Quentin, crawling backward. His face was bent to the smooth skin of Quentin’s chest, and then to his belly, and finally, he captured Quentin’s cock in his hot, greedy mouth.

Quentin’s hands grasped convulsively at the sheets, and Genie could sympathize; she’d been at the mercy of Luka’s oral skills. She could clearly recall the heat of his lips, the strength of his jaw. Quentin freed one hand, pushing the hair from Luka’s face so he could watch.

He came up to his elbows, a wild look on his face.

“Not like this, Luka... In my arms... please!” He fell back, panting, holding back the tide of orgasm.

Slowly, gently, Luka drew back, and as he moved, Genie saw his fingers pulling from Quentin’s anus. She clamped her legs together, afraid to move, afraid that if she drew their attention, this magnificent spectacle would come to an end. She felt movement at her wrists, and glanced down in shock as a green, curling vine clasped one hand and then the other, pulling her arms away from her body. She struggled slightly, but was held fast, unable to touch herself, unable to give herself relief from the arousal that was overwhelming her senses. Other vines twined around her legs, holding them apart, while others wrapped firmly around her torso, compressing her breasts in a treacherously firm grasp.

They were wrong; she wasn’t controlling the room, because Genie would never have done this to herself! She looked down; her breasts were growing rosy, and her nipples were dusky with blood. To her mortification, she felt juices running from between her parted legs, slipping down to dampen the sheets.

And the men didn’t notice.

Luka knelt between Quentin’s knees; he’d located a tube of lubricant. No doubt it had manifested as soon as he thought about it. He lubed Quentin’s ass, starting at the muscular buttocks, and then moving down to his hole. Genie felt herself go wetter, more frantic, as she saw the gleam of Quentin’s ass in the low light. He’d be a slippery ride...

Luka slipped a condom on and lubed it, and then pulled an unresisting Quentin into place.

“Do you want this, Q? Do you really want this?”

The other shifter nodded his head, his lower lip caught between white, sharp teeth. He was losing control of his form. In a moment of hysteria, Genie wondered what he’d look like with a bottle-brush tail. But she managed to stifle the laughter as Luka flexed his hips slightly, making his move into Quentin’s tight body.

Surely he’d moved in only an inch or so, but the veins on his neck stood out. Genie could see sweat breaking all over his body. He pulled back, and Quentin’s curse was harsh.

“Should I stop?”

“God, no, Luka! Please!”

So Luka moved forward again, making agonizingly slow progress. She watched in tormented fascination, and after endless moments, Genie saw Luka’s hips pressed tightly against the other man’s body. On the chill air, she caught the scent of her arousal, the wild fragrance of grass and snow and the heat of the bodies of two shifters who were deep in their mating.

Luka's hair hung down his back in sweaty strands. Quentin lay back, his knees to his chest, his arms wrapping tightly around his lover as Luka covered him, pressing gentle kisses to his face and neck.

The words were not said, but Genie knew love when she saw it.

She twisted in the grip of the vines, and was relieved momentarily when the vines around her breasts released their pressure. As the blood rushed back, her nipples began to tingle and sting; the sensation ran straight to her pussy, and her clit responded in sympathetic pain. But it was good pain, wonderful pain.

She longed to be filled, to simply be touched. She twitched her hips, trying to relieve the throb of her arousal. A muffled moan drew her eyes back to the men; Luka was now thrusting into Quentin, his movement steady, his penetration deep. The younger shifter was close; she could see his cock between their bodies. It lay stiff and engorged, and she knew that if she was closer, she'd see the liquid pearl of his pre-ejaculate slipping from the head of his cock.

Luka's buttocks flexed beautifully. She ached to hold, to touch, that beautiful body, to feel the satiny skin under her hand.

She wanted them shifted, to lie next to her, and to run her hands through their thick, lush fur.

She wanted them.

Luka's pace began to increase. Quentin ran his hands frantically over Luka's back and ass, urging him faster, harder, and he began to moan and curse. Semen burst from Quentin's shaft, slick between their bodies, and over the sounds of their frantic pleasure, Genie heard her own cry. A thick, fleshy vine pressed between her legs, giving her the friction she needed to climax. Luka cried out, throwing his head back, giving voice to all the lonely years of need that they'd suffered in silence.

She came, her channel empty, her body aching with need, and Genie went limp, hanging from the vines that supported her. She watched as the men collapsed together, panting, exhausted. Their sobbing breaths gradually slowed, and Quentin loosely brought a foot up to rest on the back of Luka's thigh.

"Luka. Luka, look." Quentin was peering up at her, and the other shifter turned, his expression going from fear to shock, to licentious pleasure.

"Oh, pretty Genie. Oh..."

Quentin laughed, but collapsed back into the bedding. "She's tied herself out for us like the most wonderful dessert, and I'm too full to eat another bite!"

"I didn't do this!" She bordered on anger at their laughter, and then couldn't help giving in to the giggles herself.

Luka rose, crawling to the foot of the bed, and knelt in front of Genie, fixing her with his bright blue gaze. "Later, pretty. We'll play with you later." He reached up and gently released the vines; they slid loose as soon as he touched them. She collapsed onto the downy comforter, barely able to pull herself to the head of the bed. Luka settled in next to Quentin, and Genie snuggled to his back, grateful that she was on the outside of the bed.

Because once they were asleep, it would be time for her to leave.

* * *

The violinist was no longer in her spot in the Underground. Only the early morning sounds of trains coming and going echoed in the tunnels. Genie wrinkled her nose at the acrid scent of the stale air. She'd never noticed that before. Nor had she noticed the bright parade of people who walked past her, with her, as she waited for the Circle Line.

Someone's wish had been granted. The woman had wished for happiness and love for Genie. In turn, she'd wished that Luka and Quentin would find their love. And for a few hours, Genie had been as close to Paradise as she'd ever known. She'd dreaded a return to her sad, grey existence, but really, did it have to be that way? Wasn't she free to choose her own path?

At the thought, she grasped the pendant at her neck.

She hadn't walked out of Last Call in her drab, timid clothing. She'd wished for new clothing, and walked out in a creamy white designer suit, her feet clad in high heels that were miraculously comfortable. Her dark hair tumbled past her shoulders in lustrous waves, and her lips were expertly tinted in red, her eyes shaded and dark. She'd merely thought about what she wanted to wear, how she wanted to look, and the room had complied with her wishes.

The club had been dark and empty, but the red-haired woman stepped from the shadows, a gleaming card in her hand.

"You forgot this earlier."

It was the platinum card. Genie gazed at it and slipped it into her purse. She looked up to thank the woman, but found herself alone. She'd shivered, knowing the woman was something powerful and dangerous.

She'd left the men nestled together in the beautiful bed and smiled down on them, knowing that they'd be fine. They'd wake up and Genie would be only an afterthought to their happiness.

She'd leaned over the bed, whispering her goodbyes.

"If I could truly grant you a wish, I would."

Luka had stirred, his hand coming up to tangle in the waves of Quentin's hair. Once he made contact, he'd sighed gently in his sleep.

They would be fine. She'd fought back tears, and then walked out of the room, her back straight, her heart at peace.

As the train clattered up to the platform, Genie stepped onboard, glancing up to see how many stops came before hers. She didn't sit; she clasped her purse in one hand, held a bar overhead with the other.

"Did my wish come true, then?"

The violinist sat on the bench to her left, and Genie was surprised that she could hear her lilting voice over the noise of the train. They swept through the tunnels, up to the surface, and then dove below the ground once again, slowing for an upcoming stop.

"Yes, I believe it did." She let go of the bar and clasped the pendant in her hand.

"You've completed all your obligations then, Genie. You've carried out your masters' wills. There will be no more servitude for you."

She frowned in confusion. What was the woman talking about?

"Read the words on the pendant."

She held it out as far as the chain allowed, squinting a bit. "It's in a foreign language. I can't read it."

"Try."

Genie held it up, catching the light as best she could. And there, as though it had always been in plain English, she read a simple phrase.

Say the word and be free.

"What?"

She glanced over to the woman, and nearly dropped the pendant. She'd vanished. Genie peered around the car, but there was nowhere the woman could have gone.

"Say the word and be free." The pendant grew warm. "The word... the word..." It was so hot that she dropped it. "Free! The word is free!"

The pendant dissolved in a flash of light, and to her surprise, no one even looked up. Colors and sounds and smells flooded her senses, and Genie staggered back against the wall of the train, clutching at a pole to keep herself upright. The sensory overload was stunning.

"Are you all right, miss?"

She nodded at the bystander, regaining her bearing. The pendant was gone, though the silver chain still hung around her neck.

And then she remembered the long-ago curse that had bound her to the silver pendant. Genie remembered her arrogance, the battle with the blonde-haired beauty. They'd fought, and the Fae had won, binding her essence to the pendant.

She remembered endless years of drudgery, being called forth to serve master after master, until in the end, Mrs. Neeley had remembered some ancient story about the pendant, and had given Genie the means to set herself free.

"I guess not all genies are bound to a lamp."

Now the pendant was gone and her curse was lifted. That meant...

"Tabula rasa. My life is a clean slate."

She glanced around the car and looked at her fellow passengers. One man had a pathetic excuse for a toupee on his head. An elderly lady sat, her joints swollen with arthritis. A young woman hid her face, ashamed of the acne that marred her skin.

With a smile, Genie made a wish and brought a little Paradise into the lives of all those who crossed her path that morning. The train slowed to a stop, the doors opened, and she stepped into the tunnels of the Underground, a smile on her lips as she heard the surprised gasps in her wake.

Chapter Six

Genie. Genie Talison. The name had to make her laugh. Her real name was lost to the ashes of the years, and was probably something that no one could pronounce. After centuries of being simply “Genie,” the name had become her own, and her assumed surname had a comfortable Persian origin.

She reclined in the plush first-class seat of the jet and watched the flight attendants hurry to finish one service, so that they could move on to the next round of drinks and low-cost snacks. Genie gazed down at her beige suit, wished it black, and smiled at the result. A bright red pocket handkerchief relieved the dark color, and her deep brown waves now gleamed with ruby highlights. Even her toenails matched the color scheme.

She had unlimited options now; the empty future was full of promise. And as for Quentin and Luka? Maybe she’d see them again one day. Maybe she’d travel to whatever city their show played in and sit quietly in the audience, watching them spin their own type of magic above the heads of the audience.

Hell, maybe she’d open her own club and bring in the Cirque du Diable as her special guests.

She sighed, willing down the sharp pain of loneliness. She’d brought them together and had left them happy and content. It was the way fate would have it, for it had been an act of self-sacrifice that had broken the curse. Luka and Quentin were now out of her hands.

She hadn’t even returned to her hotel room; it was paid up, and as for her luggage, well, there was nothing there she’d miss. She’d see the lawyer out of courtesy. The money she inherited from Mrs. Neeley would be shifted to a trust somewhere. Perhaps she’d establish a scholarship for adult students.

She’d wished her purse into a satchel and stuffed it with paperbacks and newspapers, determined to immerse herself in the world that had passed her by for so long. Remembering made her sad. The crime that had brought the curse down on her head had been forgiven. The djinn weren’t known for their humility, and the Fair Ones weren’t lauded for their mercy. But her punishment had come to an end and life moved on.

Genie leaned over the empty seat to her right and watched the sun rising on the distant horizon.

The shifters were probably waking now. They’d find her gone, but Last Call wasn’t a forever sort of establishment. It was there for quick hook-ups, for scratching that itch that only other paranormals could reach.

Forever wasn’t an option this time. Maybe someday, but not today.

Genie turned down the cocktails, halfway afraid that the flight attendant would announce “Last Call for the lady in black.” That gave her a little laugh. She wasn’t particularly hungry, so passed on breakfast as well. Genie laid back her seat and let her eyes drift shut, remembering the events

of the night as though they'd been a dream. If it weren't for the subtle aches in sensitive places, she might have convinced herself that none of it had happened.

There was some turbulence, and she shifted a little, her cheek coming into contact with a hard, muscled shoulder.

No!

In the darkened cabin, she let one eye crack open, shutting it tightly as Quentin's smiling face came into view. Genie counted to ten, turned her head away and opened both eyes.

"Surprise!"

"Luka!"

She tried not to squeal in delight, but that was the sound that came out.

"How? How did you get here? Are you on the same flight?"

"What flight is this anyway?" He looked at Quentin, who shrugged.

"Manhattan. We're... I'm going to New York to talk to a lawyer."

"I think you should forget New York. Just come with us to Montreal."

She looked at Luka in amazement.

"Luka, Quentin, how on Earth did you get here?"

"We woke up and you were gone, Genie." Quentin gave her a hurt look.

"I thought... I thought that you wouldn't mind. I thought that now that you're together..."

"We're together because you brought us together, Genie. You are as much a part of us as we are of one another."

Luka brought a finger to her chin, looking deeply into her eyes. "We need you in order to be us. And 'us' is the three of us, not just two."

"But that still doesn't explain how..."

And then she remembered. She'd stood over their sleeping forms.

"If I could truly grant you a wish, I would."

She'd offered them a wish, and they'd taken it.

“We wished ourselves at your side.” Quentin’s dark eyes were sincere, and her heart twisted at his youth, at the love that shone from his eyes.

“That could have been dangerous. I could have been on a flying carpet or inside a bottle.”

“Imp!” Luka reached out and held her tight. “You really are, aren’t you? A genie, that is?”

“So it seems. My last mistress gave me my freedom. It just took a little time to realize that’s what had happened.” She looked from one to the other. “You saved me, you know. I might never have figured it out if the two of you hadn’t brought such color and magic into my life.”

“Play,” Quentin supplied.

“Exactly.” She smiled and rested her head on his shoulder. “Did you mean it? About me going to Montreal with you?”

“Absolutely. I think the Cirque might enjoy a magic act. You could levitate rabbits and pull showgirls from your hat.”

She laughed, though it was a bad joke. She laughed because she wanted to, and they laughed along with her. They were elated that they’d found her. They were painfully relieved that she hadn’t rejected them.

With a thought, Genie manifested a large blue blanket, and the three snuggled together, hands wandering, linking, and together, they discovered that the sky was indeed a very friendly place.

Belinda McBride

Belinda was born in Inglewood, California, but grew up far to the north in the shadow of Mt. Shasta. While her upbringing seemed pretty normal to her, she was surrounded by a fascinating array of friends and family, including a polyamorous grandmother, a grandfather who is a Native American icon, and various cowboys, hippies, scoundrels, and saints.

She has a degree in history and cultural anthropology, but in 2006 made the life-changing decision to quit her job as a public health paraprofessional and stay at home fulltime to care for her severely disabled, autistic niece. This difficult decision gave Belinda the gift of time, which allowed her to return to writing fiction, which she'd abandoned years before.

Belinda's hobbies include soap making, collecting gemstones, travel, and martial arts. She has two daughters, six Siberian Huskies, and an array of wild birds that visit the feeders in the front yard. She supports no-kill animal shelters, and donates platelets twice monthly at her local blood center.

As an author, Belinda loves crossing genres, kicking taboos to the curb, and pulling from world mythology and folklore for inspiration. She is committed to taking her readers on an emotional journey and never forgets that at the end of the day, she's writing about love.

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