

Just pass the Pecan Orchard, the sweet scented fields of Magnolias brought out Magical Fairies all over West London. It was Spring season and two Siamese cats had the city on its heels. Cesar and I were at it again. Our daily routine of talking pictures and clowning around was a rollercoaster with the locals. Newspaper stands told the story of a Genie in a rock found at Windsor Castle. Cats came from as far as Hong Kong over to Berlin all the way from Louisiana. Humans were astounded. Londoners had a special way of communicating with the Cats. Their fashion, taste of food, and etiquette had many similarities.

During the day it was common to see Felines patronizing businesses on Oxford Street. Nighttime was more lively. The moonlighting seemed to transform London. "Cesar looks like we better take it in", I said as a raindrop rolled off his whisker. "Not without dinner! You owe me a plate of Friskies from Fionna Cafe." Food always brought out the best of Feline friends plus we would get a chance to see what all the Catnip was about with the Alley cats. "What's happening my Brotha's? Now how did y'all come up with that ol' story on the newsstands? A Genie you say? "Ha, Ha" laughed the Alley cats. Cesar and I were strictly confidential about spilling the beans. So when asked by one of the alley cats, "I know you have a picture of that Genie, just let me see it.", Cesar replied "You know the 'Rules' no Kit & Kaboodles no good news."

One place the Cats could count on was Fionna Cafe. The sweet temptations & Friday night karaoke added to the five star experience. The mushroom styled cafe was adjacent to CatSmart Toy Store. Oh! It was cat food heaven! By the time Cesar and I reached the front door, Fionna, an American shorthair, could be seen bustling and greeting new guests. She'd been the owner of the Cafe for over 10 years. She made sure the Cats always got great service and delicious food. Some Cats called her 'Mama Fionna'. The staff was polite and highly trained. Politeness wasn't always the case with the Head Chef Ham in becoming frustrated with non stop orders and returned tickets. Cesar and I took a seat our their usual booth. The Grandfather clock in the Cafe read 8:26 pm. Ten minutes went by and no one came to greet them. Finally, Puffs, one of

the top servers came to take their order. "What will it be tonight gentleman?" "I'll have your Chef's Special Fancy Fest with gravy and a bowl of warm Cat milk", I replied. "And for my friend here. He'll have a bowl of Friskies and a Catastic cocktail." The long wait was awkward but understood as they could see the Cafe was short on Staff. Fionna was overheard telling another table one of the Servers didn't show and that she would start hiring as quickly as in the morning to fill the position. Eyes and heads turned towards the front door of the Cafe. Cats started whistling and clapping. Cat whispers echoed through the room like a silent song. What was all the gossip about? It was Oxford, one of the big names in London. He hailed from the Loyd's of London. There he stood. His bulky stature, top hat, signature pocket watch, and eyes were a sight to see. His presence filled the room with exuberance. He could turn any setting into a Catwalk. Time seemed to have stopped but a soft voice could be heard in the background, "Dinner is served." Too cat struck to notice, Cesar knocked over his bowl of Friskies. "Maam, I do apologize!" The look on Puffs face was angered. She huffed and puffed with a frustrated tone and replied, "One more Friskies coming up." Twitching my ears and brushing my hair with my paws, I looked at Cesar and he nodded his head from side to side. Cesar sat still and well composed as if nothing had happened until Oxford could be seen approaching the table. "Hey! Y'all know there's a Ferry coming into town tomorrow. Heard it'll be all kinds of Folks and a whole new entourage of Cats. I know you and Sheppard will be up to taking some photos." In sync, Cesar and I spoke, "What's good for London is good for us!". "Great, we're expanding shipments to America soon. You guys should consider joining our new syndicate. We could use a few good loyal photographers. Enjoy your Munch!"

The news of the Genie in the paper, an opportunity for exploration and a fresh bowl of Friskies the future was looking bright. As we exited Fionna's Cafe, outside was a chauffeur, a tall, dark, well dressed Vic, and lavish Rolls Royce owned by Oxfords. Cesar and I shared a moment with the streets of London before taking it in. The city was filled with jewels of Antiquity. We made it a

block or two. In the North we could see the photogenic modeling of Big Ben. "It's beginning to rain cats and dogs Shep". Cesar was very superstitious about the rain. Refraining from getting our feet wet we hurried from awning to awning until we reached the Old Vic Theatre. Large crowds, fancy cars, and ensembles of music described a typical night at the Theatre. The influence the Theatre had on the history of London is how the Vic's got their name. Sometimes we snuck in to watch the matinee but sneak peeks on the night shift wasn't a good idea because security was known to sweep cats right out the building. Literally! A tunnel close by took us West underneath the Thames River to a row of abandoned homes right off the water built during the Antebellum period known as Cat Hill. The one with the crawling vines and big spacious windows became our humble abode. The front porch was my favorite. It had a hammock, where I usually relaxed and took the best cat naps. Our roommates and neighbors were Poets, Actors/Actresses, Comedians, Singers, Dancers, & a few grumpy old men and women. I had to play mediator on many occasions. Cat fights would break out steaming mostly from disagreements over food. Despite quarreling it was our home sweet home. The dreams of making it big blanketed our wishful thinking. We slept awaiting the morning sunshine. I had set the alarm clock for 6:00a.m. Just in time to take a quiet cat bath and catch Elmer, one of the grumpies, getting rid of morning munch. His wife thought he had enjoyed for breakfast. I raised up from my comfy bed by the window ledge and spoke charitably into the air, "Get Up!" You on going wave of fortune and familiarity. The ships sail at dawn. Cesar, stretching and yawning, stepped from his playpen known as a pallet on the floor and said, "They're ferries not ships." "Yeah basically they are the same right?" "Ferry, Berry smack em! Jerry, Cesar!" The city shall be awaiting our grand entrance. Let's move on one accord today. Finish your morning ritual and join me on the lawn in ten minutes. Don't forget to bring the camera lens.

A couple of Woodpeckers followed us through the Forest on a path of stones that appeared to be symbolic to mother nature. We made it to the bridge and double checked to make sure we had all of our camera equipment. Good to Go!! If photography was to turn into Bread and Butter,

the "Genie in the Rock" would have to spring upon the castle at the perfect time. A book Cesar and I purchased from a merchant, 2 quarters a piece, guaranteed the buyer "supernatural royalties". It was from those writings acquired, we decided to go forward with the Genie story. Legends had told of magical rocks along the castle. Persons able to crack rocks using specific photo lighting unveil the Genie inside. The same show was held at an exhibition in Germany years before. The headlines read, "The Sheppard and Cesar Show". We were really a set of class acts then. Let's just say, we didn't always rub the Genie the right way. It never stopped us from playing ring around the rosie. Following the sky blue horizon, the Hamilton Ferry sailed like Poetry in motion owning its place in the water. Many Londoners, Felines and Vics alike were gathered to Greet the passengers. Smoke from the steam engines rose and so did the loud cheers. Rhythmic, upbeat, classical jazz sounds gave an elite introduction before reaching Lambeth Pier. The calm waters made for a smooth anchoring of the Ferry. Cesar and I managed to squeeze our way up front where the Duke of London could be seen. London! London! Domine dirige nos!! May our visitors be granted the Peace and Free Will we share as commoners to partake in the city's cultural riches. The cats were looking dapper and dashing. The Vics, well, they were looking good too. A lady in a green dress with a matching Crown Hat was the center of attention, surely she was important. She sat her suitcase by the large bale of cotton. She bent down and shook the paw of a dazzling black cat. See you around town. Enjoyed speaking with you. A Vic grabbed her suitcase and followed her closely. For a second I was at a loss for words. "Hello, I am She..She.. Sheppard. If I may say so myself. YOU ARE GORGEOUS!! What a Cat collar!! Yada, yada, yada, quit ya' yapping and get to snapping," Cesar interrupted. Can't you see I am entertaining Clientele. My heart purred at the sight of such Beauty. She wasn't formally a client but the (insert) of my charm could probably win her over. A snap here and a snap there. On the count of three smile everybody! Our friend Sir Thomas from the London Press was also present. Say cheese you guys. Today's the big day. I'll be covering

the story of the "Genie". This will make the perfect picture for the front page. We'll catch you later Sir Thomas.

My only focus for the time being was catching up with the loveliest madam I had ever seen. "Slow down", Sheppard. "I can't, memories like these only come around once in a lifetime." I climbed the nearest tree to get a better perspective of where she disappeared to. Spotted like a bird's eye view. There she was strolling along Queenswalk. Leaping from the tree I tapped Cesar. Quickly, quickly follow those cat tracks and the cat chase began. She stopped, memorized by a Crown on display at the Royal Heritage store front. Perfect opportunity! The camera flashed, she looked at us with cat eyes. "Y'all two again," she said with a distinctive, melodic English accent. Her energy was captivating. Even Cesar was beginning to get the picture at this point. Allow us to reintroduce ourselves, "I'm Cesar, the romance in the brass band, the sparkling particles twinkling in the sand and this is my Assistant Sheppard." If I didn't know him any better I'd say he had a couple of loose screws. The source for our cat calls were personal, but the humor it gave off covered her like Hummingbird in East Terrace Garden. She smiled and called us the Blues Brothers. She said she'd be obliged if we were to just call her Louise. Between first impressions and a few jokes, we'd appointed ourselves tour guides of London. She retrieved an old map from her purse. Highlighted with a Red star was, Smith's Bakery, which was no longer in business. "Can you take me here she pointed?" She'd received a letter from her Aunt months ago telling her to come visit. In the letter she detailed some of London's most Historic Landmarks. Disappointed with having to be the bearer of bad news, I brushed over her excitement gently. There's plenty of places to enjoy the Sweet Treats of London, but Smith's Bakery is closed. The owner's moved to Casa Blanca. Met with the reality of disbelief, Louise grew teary eyed. Holding her head down she uttered, "Guess I should have come to London sooner." Any sign of sadness caused Cesar to kick into gear. "Don't cry Louise," he said. "Tears don't rain to well in London. Look up Louise, look on the bright side! The day is still young and the gates to the Ferris Wheel are open. Come on! You can't come to

London and not enjoy the ride." High in the sky, I remembered looking over the skyline in London and saying to myself the Lord works in mysterious ways. We shared with her tad bits and pieces about the Genie and she was elated to accompany us to the castle. We boarded the train at London Waterloo station headed to Windsor Castle. Our citywide, popularized Exhibition was set for 1:00pm. We rehearsed our roles and methods to amaze the audience once we got there. To add to the probability of our actions we even gave Louise a role. She had the simple task of sprinkling silver flakes into the rock dust once the picture was taken. I glanced at a Vic reading the newspaper and there Cesar and I were on the front page. The train cart was full, obviously everyone was headed to the same place.

Uniform men heavily guarded the Castle. Trumpeters played "God Save the Queen". We were escorted into the courtyard. Louise was astonished. She had never seen a Castle before. The Royal recognition served Brownie points on our behalf. One minute to showtime. We took our positions. I reassured Louise there was no need to be nervous. I could see the sweat on Cesar's paws. I held in any insecurities I may have had nicely. "We give honor to the Queen, Dignitaries, Magistrates, Officials, Laymen, Members and Visitors of London. We present to you the rekindling and the expectations of our 'Genie in the Rock' Exhibition." This is how I started the performance and the rest was Lights, Camera, Action. I placed the camera on the tripod, Cesar grabbed the rock and extra film, and Louise held on tightly to the silver sprinkles. "Once my assistant crushes this Black Rock the spirit of the Genie shall be provoked. When the sprinkle are splashed over the spirit, the face of the Genie will be shown in the photograph. Pound it Cesar!" Cesar pounded and barley got it to chip. Pound it Cesar!! Dust formed, Louise threw the sprinkles, and I captured the first photograph. A group of a hundred or more waited anxiously for the photograph to develop. The camera only captured the tip of Cesar's right ear. Cesar grabbed another rock, "Pound it harder Cesar!" Cesar had a better grip. Cesar pounded away. Rock dust went everywhere just as we had rehearsed. Louise threw the silver sprinkles again. I hit the release button on the camera and flash! This time the camera only captured nada,

nothing, zilch, zero. The audience chuckled and now seemed to get impatient. "Come on! Come on!", said Sir Thomas. There were other activities scheduled at that castle. I could feel our notoriety beginning to slip. "Again", I shouted. Louise witnessing the embarrassment was ever more a reason I felt the urgency to succeed. Cesar never lost inspiration. He grabbed another rock and went to hammering away. Smoke lifted from the rock and dust clouds formed again. Louise waited for the perfect moment to sprinkle her magi. Flash! All that I managed to capture was a picture of Louise's blurred scarf. Our bragging rights were finished.

I just wanted to be left alone. A drink from Fionna's would settle the mind. Great minds sure do think alike. Cesar spoke, "How about Fionna's Cafe. Lunch on me." I knew we would be the laughing stock of London, but Music and a good meal made for a great way to escape heartbreak hotel.