

W•NDER CITY ST•RIES

VOLUME 4:
WHOSE DREAMS COME
TRUE

BY JUDE MCCLAUGHLIN

EPISODE #4

Committed to Uneasy Street

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Tatyana Azizevna Zhuravleva was stretching at the barre after her morning workout while inspecting the damage she had done to the dummies. One was headless, its artificial skull powdered against the far wall—*Gauche*, she thought, mentally giving herself a fine of practicing that move the next day—and another one had collapsed to the ground, all its skeleton-like supports neatly snapped. A third was propped against a wall with its plastic and ceramic spine broken in three places. *Not terrible*, she decided, nodding to her reflection.

Then the tremor shook the room.

Nothing *physically* moved. However, her senses told her that reality had been shifted somehow. She froze, closing her eyes and straining to "feel" anything else. There were a few distant echoes, like ripples in a four-dimensional material, but no other major reality tremors.

After a few minutes of "listening", she finished her cool-down and went to shower. A half-hour later, she was at her computer in the office upstairs, emailing her superior at the Bureau of Paranormal Affairs in Washington.

When the webcall rang, she picked it up, flicking it onto the screen. "Yes?"

"Agent Crane, are you certain?" Anthony Cagliano said from his wood-panelled office, using the nickname based on the translation of her surname, like many other people in the Bureau who couldn't be arsed to figure out how to correctly pronounce "Zhuravleva."

"Yes, sir," she said, using the British-inflected accent all the American top brass seemed to feel was so very sophisticated. "Definitely at least a grade 4 reality quake. With a few—undetermined number—low-grade aftershocks. I believe I felt a smaller one early this morning that woke me up, but there were no aftershocks there, so I couldn't confirm."

"Well, you know the protocols better than I do," Cagliano admitted. "I'd like daily reports in email, please."

She rewarded his politesse with an acknowledging nod slow enough to be a bow. "Do you have a preferred outcome, sir?"

Cagliano cleared his throat awkwardly. He was a few years younger than Tatyana, newly promoted over her head, and he had never had to make the decisions in a situation like this. "I believe the Bureau would prefer this one alive, if possible."

"Of course, sir," she said, reflecting that the last three reality-shifters she'd encountered had been... disinclined to offer themselves into government service. *I still regret the child most.*

"Thank you, Agent Crane," he said, disconnecting.

She shut down her end of the call and considered for a long moment. *Well, I suppose I can listen to news broadcasts and do my paperwork at the same time.* She activated the wall of television screens and set up social media auto-alerts for various key phrases and hashtags like *#KeepWonderCityWeird*," and then started filling out the necessary reports and requisitions on her computer. The hunt would likely be long and difficult here in Wonder City: so many paras to investigate, so little time before the world might shatter.