

Dancing Magicians

Chapter 1

Walking down Sutro Steps to Cliffside Cafe where Philip was waiting, no doubt sipping coffee, I paused a moment to recall the previous night's affair. Shasta was fixing dinner, the kitties napping on the couch, and I was reading the recent issue of *MUM*, the Society of American Magicians' monthly journal. An article on mentalism had caught my attention. Suddenly an eerie sensation, a disturbing feeling, passed through me. I looked up. The kitties had their ears up and tuned in.

Shasta entered from the kitchen and commented, "I felt something strange like a low level vibrating sound or energy."

"I felt it too," I replied. "And Lucy and Karma were aware of it."

"Of course they would be." Shasta looked at them, now with their heads lifted staring at us.

A second time the strange phenomenon occurred.

"An earthquake? No, something else," I said.

Twice more we experienced the weirdness—an uneasy feeling resonating through our home. A quiet, more exactly a deep silence, not quite ominous, nor scary yet definitely strange filled the house. A lingering uncertainty pervaded our home, and we were still concerned this morning.

San Franciscans will realize their San Francisco isn't being described accurately. For in our beloved city, Sutro Steps leading to Cliffside Cafe don't exist. Thus imaginative readers will recognize the scene is existing in an alternate reality, a parallel universe. And too the story lives in a world its own. Yet its personal cosmos is directly and concretely linked to the readers' reality. Perceptive readers will notice along the way several parallel worlds have been laid upon each other, squeezed into a single universe with changing viewpoints. Whether this bit of dramatic magic reflects our daily world I will not judge.

Please forgive the break in the narrative, but I think it's necessary to shine light on the story's reality. So as I descended to Cliffside Cafe, I was puzzling over the strange phenomena my household experienced last night. It was in the forefront of my thoughts, and I planned to tell Philip about it.

Cliffside Cafe is situated about halfway down Sutro Heights Hill. Sutro Heights Park is located on top of the promontory. The stairs descend to the Great Highway that runs along Ocean Beach. Stepping onto the outdoor dining area, I saw Philip through a large glass window sipping coffee. He is a regular customer regardless of the weather. The cafe is close to the Institute and, even when crowded, gives him a private space for his contemplative moments.

Institute of Consciousness-Imagination-Nous or Institute of CIN is the full name. Philip bubbles with merriment when ultra-conservative critics call it Institute of SIN. Wondering if they're being ironic, he interprets their name as Institute of Sacred Imaginative Nous and believes it's a more accurate description of the work accomplished at the Institute. Most knowledgeable people just say the Institute.

Philip Austen is interested in occult activities and has spent the past forty years researching different areas in the broad spectrum of psychic happenings. His bibliography is fairly long, seven books and numerous articles. He is now studying the transformation of energy in psychological and, I suspect, spiritual processes. I don't think he would use the word 'spiritual,' yet he is fully open to such experiences. He performs his research at the Institute where he has an office and a two member team of like-minded investigators.

Last year Philip asked me to join his research project at the Institute with a position of consultant. He thinks the inner operation, structure, and processes of psychic power are revealed and become available for study during a magician's performance. Even though the mage is only acting the part, his act rests on

the surface of psychic energy, and during his routines the energy will be perceived. His thesis certainly captured my interest, and I agreed to the position but without pay. I knew I would enjoy the project and could gather material for my next magic show.

I have been enchanted by magic since I was a child. After graduating with a BA from San Francisco State University, I decided to earn my living as a magician and have done fairly well.

So I, Ralph Garland, hastened to offer a personal experience for research. Whether Philip would consider it of scientific value or not was unclear.

Philip looked up when Ralph entered the cafe. Sensing a seriousness shrouding Ralph, he felt a troubling concern. He relaxed, sitting back into the chair, smiling as his friend sat down.

As they exchanged the usual pleasantries, Philip observed Ralph's behavior. "Any good dreams recently, Ralph?"

I laughed in an uneasy manner. Here was a typical Philip ploy. Discussing dreams was a portal to one's inner world and ultimately the collective unconsciousness.

"Well, I had an unusual experience. If I claimed it a dream, you would politely inquire and then soon forget it."

"Ah, the big IF. Not a dream then?"

"No. The Garland household experienced it. Perhaps a group hallucination but not a dream."

"Don't keep me in suspense, Ralph, with your misdirection. Lay it out."

I proceeded to describe the event in all its weirdness. Philip said very little during the telling of the twice-told tale. He only requested more details at a few points. Philip is fond of saying, "Truth resides in the details." I know he's not a poet seeking the right metaphor. He is a friend of chaos theory and its focus on forms within forms. I kid him he's actually stating an alchemical recipe: "as above, so below." We enjoy our quibbles and colorful retorts.

When Ralph had finished his report, Philip sat quietly, then called the waiter over and ordered a coffee refill.

After fresh coffee had been served, we talked about inconsequential things. A flock of pelicans flew overhead. We commented on their comeback after being on the endangered list. The recent storm had done less damage to the city than it had to the northern part of San Francisco Bay. So we remarked about that.

Finally Philip leaned forward indicating a tête-à-tête. "Ralph, this happening has the earmarks of a psychic event. I would like to investigate it further. It would tie in with an idea I'm working on."

"What's the idea?" I inquired.

"I don't want to say much at the moment. I can tell you it involves psychic energy exchange. I'm afraid I don't have a precise definition yet, so let's leave it vague."

I nodded. "Okay with me. Call it transformation of energy and I'm in." His proposal had an intimation of Hermes' craft attached to it.

"Yes, that's an apt phrase. Here's a possible catch though. I would like to involve Shasta and the kitties, if possible."

"I'll ask them though I can't guarantee anything."

"Accepted."

While mixing extra dry martinis for our happy hour, I mentioned to Shasta my conversation with Philip and his curiosity about our experiences. She was preparing dinner, an orzo dish with mixed vegetables. Later green salsa would be added.

"I don't know. I'm working on my novel and don't want to spend time on a research project. As for the

kitties I don't want them hooked up to equipment and experimented on. I put myself in that category too. No experiments. But if you want to indulge, go ahead."

"I'll talk with Philip."

"Actually now I'm thinking about it, if he would like to make a social call between three to five some afternoon, I'd be happy to tell him my experiences. And if he can communicate with the kitties as we do, fine, if they're willing."

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Readers' Reviews

"I see your story(ies) as a movie! Where's Rod Sterling when we need him to do an adaptation? Your tale is truly "beyond the boundaries of imagination," as Sterling used to say. If I knew how, I'd work "DM" into a screenplay. Did you "think cinema" while you were writing?

You've given us a page turner. Another queerie (misspelling deliberate). How did you do all that intricate plotting?" – Joel Laski

"What a wonderful imagination you have!!" – Norm Sams

"The cats are back! Readers of John Caris' other novels will remember that Lucy and Karma serve as a 'Greek Chorus' to the action in his books. They watch (and react) as Ralph and Shasta Garland their friends eat, drink and talk in their San Francisco home. . . .

Quite wonderfully, despite perils, the final chapters bring us to a splendid performance. Drums, singing, magic tricks . . . the audience fills the hall with loud applause." – Esta Wolfram

Other books by John Caris

Spenser Blake's Secret 2016

Spenser Blake has a secret about an important early Christian theme: the friendship of Jesus and Lazarus. Listening to his inner voice, he decides to hire Shasta Garland, author of the popular Peaches Peoples detective novels, to write a story conveying his controversial interpretation of the idea.

Hermes Beckons 2006

Alchemy and magic dominate. Magician Ralph Garland embarks on a quest to discover the secrets hidden in Hermes' craft. His research branches into diverse religious traditions, including the Neolithic goddess religion. He journeys beyond the veil and initiates a response from the spirit realm. Many strange experiences occur as he progresses in his alchemical studies, and when his conventional worldview disintegrates, he finally emerges through the portal of mysteries. In fear of losing his mind he opens his heart to his friend and love Shasta Garland, who is writing a new novel in her on-going detective series, one that will apply the theme of magic. She supports him in the healing process, and her nurturing strengthens his resolve to attain his mystical aspirations by producing a magical presentation of alchemy: The Alchemical Light Show. Together the couple evolve toward a spiritual healing and bonding.

Foundation for a New Consciousness 1987

Guided by Hermes' art, John Caris finds the path to a higher consciousness, one grounded in a holistic and alchemical matrix that encourages the growth of a healthy mind. All the arts—including music, art, and literature—are rooted in the sacred tradition and form the center of meditation. From ancient times the arts have conveyed mystical knowledge besides practical skills of their crafts. The treasure discovered on the golden path is paradoxical thinking, the key to a higher consciousness.

Reality Inspector 1982

An early, perhaps the first, computer-hacking novel.

A world championship chess match is the backdrop for this intriguing mystery story. The main computer of the Federal Reserve is being tampered with by a sinister power, and the results could wreak havoc with the fiscal policy, causing the U.S. economy to fragment into pieces. Actual chess games are used, and they act as launching pads for journeys into strange and challenging worlds.