

Spenser Blake's Secret
Chapter 1

Shocked. Frightened. And – excited, I sat back in my chair, sipped green tea and observed my studio. “Well, kitties, what compelling force is driving my life?” Lucy and Karma glanced about the room and gave their reply. Karma cleaned her paws, noting a total agreement, and Lucy jumped and grabbed a fly winging through the air, also in accord with my decision – a leap into the strange forbidden world of psi adventures. Even the orchids on a table next to my desk were brighter.

I listened to the message for a second time and very, very carefully. Yes, I had heard it correctly the first time. The message was opening the portal and I was attracted. The caller wanted to hire Peaches and her team to investigate a matter of serious import.

I paused in my thoughts wondering if my fictional detective team had left the pages of the books I had written about them and now inhabited physical bodies. I was troubled by the strangeness of the event but set it aside for the moment. A weird goofball playing the cosmic keyboards – whatever, my husband, Ralph, would enjoy hearing the story during happy hour before dinner when we were all ensconced in the living room, Ralph and I sipping extra dry martinis and the kitties – Lucy and Karma – quietly engaged in watching the antics of their house mates.

The caller, his deep nasal voice -- vibrating with emotional intensity and demand -- stated emphatically he wanted to meet me in person and could or would not discuss the matter over the phone because of the many-layered surveillance the government and its global service corporations used to spy on citizens. A very curious attitude: revealing he has a secret which he wants to share. If he is so frightened of surveillance, why busy himself with such foolishness?

He would be at Coffee and Tea Company, which specialized in a variety of coffees and teas plus pastries and other snacks on West Portal, a commercial street near our home. He would arrive at 10 am and stay for an hour before leaving if I did not show. He would be there for five days – Monday through Friday – and if I was uninterested in the case, he would find someone else.

I was definitely intrigued and would meet him not only to observe his behavior for future use in a novel but to discover the reason for wanting Peaches Peoples Investigation Service to take him on as a client. Reality seems silly, but it has a sturdy cosmic foundation.

It was happy hour, a time of relaxation, sharing the day's events, and enjoying Ralph's extra dry martinis. We held our early evening festivities in the living room, which was fairly large – eighteen by twenty-two feet -- and had a high vaulted ceiling. A wood-burning stove was inserted into the stone fireplace situated in the north wall. Almond and walnut logs were stacked near the stove. A table with pots of orchids was adjacent to the fireplace. Large windows in the west wall provided a view of the street and the sunset. The living room had two entrances: one leading into what used to be called a formal dining room; the other linked the vestibule and hallway to the living room. A couch and side tables were against the east wall. Four upholstered chairs were placed conveniently around the room for conversation.

The kitties, Lucy and Karma, were curled up on the couch with Ralph while I sat at a round wood table placed near the south wall. Books and magazines I was reading were piled on the table. Several pens, a notepad, and my journal were also there. The table was my space, and I always sat there when in the living room.

Ralph Garland my partner was a stage magician, who was quickly drifting off into occult study and

exploration of the psi realm. I had only recently ventured into such areas of reality, being devoted to my writing. Perhaps I could now do both. Ralph had accomplished such feats as remote viewing, out-of-body experience, and strong mental exploits.

“He wanted what, Shasta?” A puzzled look appeared on Ralph’s face as he sipped his martini. “Please walk me through that again, dear,” he requested.

I did and he shook his head in disbelief. “It’s weird I admit and captivating enough to meet him and learn more. I’ll go to the rendezvous tomorrow,” I said.

Ralph looked at me intently. “You have that light of curiosity and intrigue in your eyes. Of course, I can go with you if you wish,” he remarked.

I laughed. “No, I’m a big girl and can handle the situation. Besides the Coffee and Tea Company is a popular shop. What’s to fear?”

“I’m just as curious as you are, but I guess I’ll have to wait until tomorrow’s happy hour for details.”

The kitchen timer rang, and the kitties jumped off the couch and led me into the food fixing area. A few minutes later I called out, “Dinner’s ready.”

I stood at an open window of my study looking out at the garden Ralph and I have cultivated. It was springtime and as usual weeds ruled the land. A gentle breeze lifted sweet fragrance of star jasmine up to the window. I breathed the scent in deeply, expanding my air passages to catch its nuances. The garden is sectioned into microclimate areas – from sunny to shady and wet to dry. Native California and San Francisco plants intermingled with non-natives. Here was nature’s magic. Nature’s wonderful chemical lab creating chlorophyll to produce photosynthesis.

A fluttering movement by the fuchsia bushes caught my attention. I looked carefully at the bushes and noticed an Anna’s hummingbird feeding from the red flowers. Its iridescent ruby throat balanced the iridescent green feathers of its back. A female and male had taken up residence in the garden and had bred many families over the years. Hummingbirds are such a joy to have as neighbors.

I turned and walked over to my desk. Seeing Anna was a good sign, I thought. Sitting down, I examined the material Spenser Blake had given to me to write his novel. That’s about it. Write a novel that conveyed ideas he wanted published. My memory of the meeting was clear.

When I entered the Coffee and Tea Company on Monday at a little after 10 am, I glanced around the room. Sitting by himself toward the back of the shop in a corner half hidden from view was a middle-aged man, his hair well trimmed, with a small bushy mustache on his square face. He was stout, not fat, and appeared to exercise frequently. He sat upright, ramrod like a prudish minister. His metal rimmed glasses were firmly fixed on his nose. His smile disclosed teeth with decay. Like me he obviously didn’t care about going to a dentist for repair. He was wearing a conservative cut dark blue suit and a matching blue tie. As I headed in his direction, he stood and waved me over to his table. A few people looked at us, but most were absorbed in their beverages and snacks. As I reached the table, he stood and greeted me with a handshake. Since the cafe was self-serve, he asked, “Let me treat. What would you like to drink?”

“Well, thank you. A chocolate mocha with whipped cream, please.” So much for my vaunted diet.

I set my shoulder bag on the table and sat down. I removed a pen and writing tablet, ready for action. My curiosity had risen.

When he returned with the beverage, we settled in and discussed his job offer.

I remarked, “Your offer to hire Peaches was quite startling, and I wasn’t sure what you were getting at. So

please explain while I enjoy my mocha.”

“I’ve a secret that has serious social and religious complications if revealed. And that’s what I want to do – tell the world the secret. But – and here is where serious problems arise – I fear certain groups would be very displeased and would try to destroy me, my family and friends, and my financial security.” He glanced around the room as if he was being observed by unseen eyes.

Breaking the spell of anxiety, I inquired, “May I ask some questions, ones that have been troubling me?”

“Yes. Go ahead.”

“First, what is this secret that will upset so many and perhaps bring about a disaster for you?”

He smiled; a wry grin crossed his face. “I’m sorry, but it’s a need to know situation. If you decide to accept my proposal, I’ll provide the details. Let’s just say it’s a secret that has powerful consequences.”

I nodded my head. “Fair enough. We’ll call it the secret for now. The strange part of your offer is hiring Peaches to investigate. Why?”

“Because Peaches and her team are fictional characters who have inspected and probed some very unusual circumstances, like a recent story where Peaches learns about the throat chakra and discovers remote viewing. How imaginative that story was. Would a reader believe you had that power or were only relying on your creative skills?”

“Ah, of course, the creative imagination explains all. Safety resides there in the fictitious realm.” I laughed softly, now understanding his motive. “I’m intrigued. Please continue.”

“The secret concerns a religious matter of utmost importance to early Christianity. Its revelation would bring disturbing controversy to the Christian community. And many would want to banish the truth and mete out punishment to those who disclose the truth.”

“So to protect yourself I would author the book, but you would provide the ideas and themes. Well, what about me?”

“The novel will probable become a best seller and you’ll earn millions of dollars.” He chuckled.

“Then you don’t believe I’ll be threatened or my life will be in danger?” My tone was a bit sarcastic.

“No. Think of the theme of the Da Vinci Code that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married, and all those who have profited by using the theme have never been threatened or destroyed. Criticized, of course, but not ruined. Also the subject has been discussed on the internet and in scholarly discourse, and popular books have been written about it. Now I wish to publish my slant on the matter, which is a controversial interpretation, my secret, of the subject.”

“And why should I be the ghostwriter?”

“Simply, because you’re a well known writer of detective mysteries and have a wide readership. I’ll handled the promotion angle. And the theme should be discussed in the media even if people have not read the book yet. It’s the revelation of the secret or the novel’s dominant theme that’s important.”

“If I understand correctly, you want me to write a Peaches mystery to broadcast a secret you believe is important enough to upset the Christian religious community?”

“Yes. I’ve a contract here.” He opened a briefcase, after placing it on the table, and removed a folded bundle of papers. “Basically, the contract states that I’ll pay you a specific sum of money on completion of the manuscript, purchase a specified number of copies, and will take over the promotion. If your publisher refuses to publish it or wants to make substantial changes in the manuscript, I’ll find another publisher who will accept it for publication. You’ll own all copyrights to the novel and any royalties from sales will accrue to you.”

“So, you’re willing to spend a fair amount of money to get this secret across to the public. Might I ask why? And also what’s the source of your wealth?”

Spenser laughed. “You want to hear my personal history. Well, it’s too involved and long to recite now. A short statement is that a trust fund has been set up for me by my family, and I come from a long line of biblical scholars. If you accept my offer, I’d be delighted to spend time socializing and talking about my family background.” He handed me the contract and stated, “Read it carefully. Discuss it with your husband, and if you accept my offer, sign the contract and mail it back to me in the stamped addressed envelope. If I don’t hear from you in a month’s time, I’ll know you aren’t interested and will seek someone else for my mission.”

I stood and took the contract from him, thanked him again for the mocha and left, slightly dazed from the weirdness of the undertaking.

I was working a Sudoku puzzle while Ralph was inspecting the orchids for aphids. Four orchids were set on a table near the fireplace. “Well, tell me about your adventure this morning.”

“Oh, what a bang – in all senses. Is this guy a jerk or a nut or a little of each? But it’s a job, an intriguing one at that. The caller, one Spenser Blake, wants to hire Peaches and team to investigate an important matter for him. He’s very suspicious about government spying and doesn’t wish to discuss the job over the phone or by email, but only in person.”

“Weird and weirder. Spenser Blake, the name sounds familiar.”

“It should be since both names refer to important English writers: Spenser for Edmund Spenser, Elizabethan poet and best known for his major poem *The Faerie Queene*. And Blake —”

“Of course. William Blake, mystic, artist, and poet.”

“Which puts my potential client within a specific area of English literature.”

“Are you going to take the job?”

“Definitely. I’m fascinated by the prospects.”

Both Karma and Lucy sat up and began cleaning their front paws – a sure sign they were in full agreement.

The timer bell rang from the kitchen. “I’d better check on dinner.” I got up and walked toward the kitchen, the kitties out in front.

“What are we having?”

“Spaghetti. If the sauce is ready, I’ll start the noodles.”

“Anything I should do?”

“You can prepare the garlic toast after the noodles are in the pot.”

He sipped the martini, thinking about the ramifications of Shasta’s new project. It would be an intriguing adventure.

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Readers' Reviews

“Spenser Blake's Secret is suspenseful and briskly paced. . . .

Philosophy, mythology, magic, technology, science fiction, alternative realities, human capacity for good or ill- and cats- crowd every page.” – Joel Laski

“It was a joy to revisit the Garlands and Peaches and their new friends and kitties. Your story of their efforts to overcome misguided greed and selfishness by utilizing interior awareness and cooperative action in addition to intellect and determination goes straight to my heart. Well done. Brilliant.” – June Johnson

“I enjoyed the San Francisco characters.” – Norm Sams

“I certainly enjoyed reading Spencer Blake's Secret. The combining of the Lazarus story with alchemy was very interesting. Of course I always enjoy keeping up with Shasta, Ralph, Lucy and Karma.” --Tom Whitten

Other books by John Caris

Dancing Magicians 2013

Magic and psychic feats abound while psi field intersects with cyberspace. Magician Ralph Garland, participating in psychic experiments at Institute of Consciousness-Imagination-Nous, alters the fabric of reality. His worldview shattered, he journeys through the secret mansion to regain his vital self. Shasta Garland, poet and novelist, embarks on a quest with a new mystery story featuring detectives from Peoples Investigations, who are caught in a web of role-playing wizards inhabiting the astral zone. The Garlands become entangled with others who are on their own path of self-discovery and renewal.

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.