

D.S. Arschloch's high school girlfriend is pregnant. His solution qualifies him to become a youthful hit man for petty criminal Rocky Conigliaro. But an enterprising, mind reading Kat O'Callahan, her former college professor Cosmo Grove, and the ghost of D.S.'s late girlfriend hook up to try to bring him to a strange kind of justice.

Imagining Magic

by Bill Cosgrove, Ph.D.

Order the complete book from the publisher

[Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9988.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



Imagining Magic

BILL COSGROVE PH.D.

Copyright © 2018 Bill Cosgrove, Ph.D.

ISBN: 978-1-59113-010-9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2018

First Edition

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: He Was 15	11
CHAPTER 2: Follow the Drinking Gourd	20
CHAPTER 3: Fruit of the Poisonous Tree	29
CHAPTER 4: More Sinned Against Than Sinning	38
CHAPTER 5: North of Naive	49
CHAPTER 6: Magic Mushrooms	61
CHAPTER 7: Auras and Emissions	72
CHAPTER 8: Voice From The Past	82
CHAPTER 9: A Job and A Tool.....	91
CHAPTER 10: A Pleasant Fall Afternoon	103
CHAPTER 11: Just Business.....	113
CHAPTER 12: A Darkening Rainbow	122
CHAPTER 13: Telepathic Communication.....	131
CHAPTER 14: My Word is My Bond.....	142
CHAPTER 15: “The Readiness is All”	151
CHAPTER 16: An Emergency in the Neighborhood	160
CHAPTER 17: Supernatural Soliciting	169
CHAPTER 18: Gatsby.....	181
CHAPTER 19: A Trojan Horse	191
CHAPTER 20: Hitting the Wahls.....	200
CHAPTER 21: College Stake Out.....	209

CHAPTER 22: Impediments and Impalements	220
CHAPTER 23: Sword of Damocles.....	231
CHAPTER 24: Hallucinogens and Hallucinations	243
CHAPTER 25: Imagining Maiming	253
CHAPTER 26: Getting Strangled.....	263
CHAPTER 27: Everybody Has Something to Hide	273
CHAPTER 28: House of Spirits	283
CHAPTER 29: Reconstructed Memories	294
CHAPTER 30: The Cat and the Perfessor	304
CHAPTER 31: Imagining Truth.....	314
CHAPTER 32: Vanishing Point	325
CHAPTER 33: “Hell, Not-Hell, Heaven”.....	337

CHAPTER 2: Follow the Drinking Gourd

"I knew I'd have to do it when those altar boy phrases kept jumping into my head. But I didn't know when or how until now. It wasn't as if I had to have a good reason -- I just decided to do it because I had to. I took the .22 that dad had given me for my birthday, cleaned it the way he taught me, and hid it back in the garage. I planned to have her meet me after work with her car, pick up the .22 at home, and drive around with her until dark."

He could remember the exact Latin phrases he had whispered to himself each time he thought about what he had to do.

"*Lavabo inter innocentes*. Why did I think of that now? It's funny how those altar boy things stuck with me when I didn't really even want to be one. I'm going to have to do it. It's funny how you think of stuff like that."

Sometimes he didn't know whether he was talking back and forth to himself, or with someone else in his head, or just rambling on in some kind of monologue.

"'In just-spring.' That strange guy with the small letters and shaved head. At least that's what that one teacher told us. He wasn't so bad I guess. I've had

worse. God, I'm going to have to do it. Lavabo... In just-...

“And why now, so close to Christmas and my birthday? I'm going to be getting my driver's license. And I just got that job at the drive-in. Sweet sixteen. Why did it have to happen now, to me? We didn't do anything so bad. Lots of others have done worse. And they aren't even fifteen... and I'm almost sixteen. We don't deserve this. And she doesn't deserve it either, but what else can I do? I wonder what it feels like, being... like that. I wonder if she even really knows for sure. Heck, we've talked enough about it already, I guess. What will it feel like, though, when... when...?”

After they ate they continued to drive around South Kaposia talking a little and settling nothing. It was almost as though there was little to be said about her being pregnant at 16. He thought she hadn't really dealt with it at all, and couldn't see the problem for what it was. And so she had no answers for what to do about it. Earlier, she told him that it wasn't that big a deal and that she could handle it. She wasn't the one he was worried about, though. He was the one whose life was really going to be screwed up, he thought.

About 9:00 he pulled over well beyond where an old Concord Street service road becomes a dirt road and curves away over a culvert down by St. Kaposia

Park. They'd been there before at night by the corner of a pasture that enclosed a tangled looking scrub tree with some old barbed wire and wooden posts. It had taken on special meaning for them during the previous summer, and no less now, especially now.

They hadn't talked for quite a while. Billie got out of the car, and started to walk a little off the road toward the pasture. She liked the small, gnarled tree tucked safely into the corner of the overgrown, rough grass pasture. Years of wind, rain, blizzards, and cows had bent and battered it, and it was still there. To her it looked like a picture or painting that she could always see whenever she wanted to. It would always be there for her. It wasn't particularly pretty or colorful, but it was something she liked and admired for its stark, stunted, tangled beauty.

The air was cold even for early December. He was looking for the Big Dipper up in the northern sky. And the pole star. He'd heard or read in some history or English class about the slaves in the South escaping to the North by following the Big Dipper, by keeping it ahead of them as they fled. "Follow the drinking gourd" was the way he remembered it from some song or other he'd heard or been told about.

They looked to it for direction, guidance, even salvation he sensed without knowing it fully, or seeing any connection with himself. He sometimes had

trouble connecting things outside himself with his own life. He was impressed, though, when he learned that many of the fugitive slaves figured to walk the whole way to Canada, or somewhere.

“Those guys musta really wanted to escape,” he remembered saying to his teacher in class. So do I, he remembered telling himself. So do I.

But he was looking in the wrong place. He had never heard of the trick for locating The Big Dipper and Ursa Major – he was looking high in the cold northern sky for it. It was there, what he wanted was there, right in front of him, but he didn’t see it, couldn’t find it, and really didn’t know how to find to it.

Billie never could see much of anything in the sky. To her the sky was largely empty except for the sun and moon and those twinkling stars at night. It was beautiful and awesome, as she was told, but it was beyond anything that really touched her daily life. It didn’t add much to her life other than to make her feel small and insignificant. She found little solace in looking at it. What she was looking for was the warped little tree standing alone in the corner of the pasture.

In the meantime, D. S. found what he was looking for in the trunk. He took out the .22 rifle, removed it from the bag, and turned toward where Billie had

walked off into the dark. Even then, the altar boy phrases came into his head like an incantation – automatically, unbidden, jumbled, a mixture of clichés and odd references he'd accumulated and been unable to clear from his head.

Domine non sum dignus. She isn't even looking at the sky. Can't think about what she's worth. Don't think about who she is, what she is. She's just a... just a... piece of furniture. Upholstered bones. A frame with padding and springs and webbing. Quality stuff, though. Springs, not wire. Bolted, not stapled. Mortised joints. Arms, legs, back, seat. An overstuffed chair. Full of... my... et vitam aeternam. A wing chair -- just right for the fireplace, sipping brandy, chess, smoking jacket, playboy of the western world.

He had decided that he would not aim at Billie when he shot. Looking down the barrel through the sight at her would be too premeditated, he told himself, too deliberate. He wasn't going to aim to kill so much as just let it happen if it would. Just hold the thin, harmless looking .22 against his hip like a pole vaulter's pole level to the ground in her general direction, and pull the trigger. See what happens. If it's supposed to happen, then it will somehow. If not, let it be.

He looked at her walking slowly into the dark toward the twisted, stunted tree in the pasture corner

and didn't notice anything different about her. She was the same girl he'd had so much fun with over the summer while discovering she was different from what he had thought she was. She'd taken in the bad news and was not changed or stricken by it. He was.

She seemed more in the rhythm and flow of what you could expect and get from life than he was. She accepted and coped; he watched and worried and plotted. She hadn't changed really from when he met her a year or more earlier; she'd only kind of revealed herself to him. One of her teachers had called it exfoliating, but she didn't know what that meant. Though it sounded kind of neat to her.

But he felt that he'd become scared and less confident inside, and that he had to get back to where he was before he met her. There was only one way to do that – but he'd let something other than himself decide. If hers were the right way, it would come out; if it weren't, he'd let that be right. Her passive acceptance versus his active self-doubt. Let one win out with as little direction from him as possible. Or responsibility.

He caught whiffs of her in the crisp air as she slowly walked toward the pasture. It was the strawberry lip-gloss that he liked so much when she kissed him. And even when she didn't, he liked the looks of it on her silvery lips. Its scent barely hung in

the air and he may even have imagined it. But her aroma was there in small pockets of the night air floating by him, displaced by her movement away from him into the dark.

The collar of her fuzzy sweater that she knew he liked stuck up above the collar of her denim, hip-length jacket. Her hair, short in front, was parted in back and fell down across the front of her shoulders. With her hands in her front pockets and head down a little, she seemed to hesitate in moving slowly away from him, hoping he'd call her back. There was nowhere to go out there, but he felt she'd soon be gone.

He brought the .22 from behind his back and swiveled it 90 degrees at his hip in Billie's general direction. Let what happens be determined by luck or chance. He'd seen movies where they shot from the hip like that. Almost like Little Richard or Chuck Berry or Johnny Cash holding his guitar. Pull the trigger and see if she's hit, if she is supposed to die, or not. The first one would be the decider – if he had to operate the bolt action to rechamber a bullet, he'd have to lift the gun off his hip and take responsibility for aiming it. That's what he couldn't do.

Much later, when asked what he knew about Billie's disappearance and death, he eventually admitted what he'd done.

"I killed her. I shot her with my .22 as she was walking away from the car. And again as she fell into the grass by the old barbed wire fence. The bolt action worked surprisingly easy for the second shot as I walked toward her. I kept walking toward her trying to work the bolt again, but stopped... and walked back to the car. I threw the gun back in the trunk, and then I jumped into the trunk, too. Stayed there about fifteen minutes. While I was crouching there I felt like I had disappeared, like I was falling through the floor.

"When I got out I carried and dragged her up the ditch and stuffed her in a culvert as far as I could. It was clean and dry in there -- it was okay. She'd be better off in there than lying out in the ditch or on the road. I wouldn't have to worry about her being exposed to the weather and such.

"Then I drove away -- toward St. Kaposia Park, I think. I drove pretty fast, I guess. She's got a really nice car -- handles well even on county roads. I had a couple of the cigarettes. I didn't think I'd be able to light the first one, but I didn't have any trouble. They were hers, too, really. She'd bought them for me while we were driving around. She bought me lots of things. They were the last things of hers I had, except for the purse. I was glad I had them -- I really needed them while I was driving. I dropped her car off at her house

and went home. I took the .22 in the bag and her purse with me and put them in the garage."

She used to let him drive her car a lot, and liked giving him things; he never wondered why. He just took it for granted that she would do what she could to please him. He took it for granted that he deserved it and was entitled to it. He appreciated it all, he told himself, but took it to be what he deserved and the least she could do for him. He knew he was lucky to have her; he was certain she was glad to have him.

He thought his enjoyment of everything they did together meant he was concerned for her welfare. It didn't. He thought the fun and pleasure they shared meant that he was a good kid. He wasn't. He thought he worried and cared about her. He didn't. Why she should treat him so well never occurred to him. That she did everything she could to please him was all that really mattered to him. Why shouldn't she?

CHAPTER 15: “The Readiness is All”

On Tuesday, March 20, 2013 at 4:00 a.m. Kat and Cosmo Grove were parked outside a fashionable two-story house in Portland Park in Kaposia City. They watched D.S. Arschloch approach the house on foot from the south and pause in front of it. He looked at the house, then up and down the street. Kat got out of the car and walked toward him. Dressed in dark clothes, he had a splash of white shirt at his neck like a priest’s Roman collar. Around him he had a pulsating, crimson glow that Kat read as excitement and apprehension. She was in all back, like a ninja warrior.

She asked him quietly where he’d parked.

He looked at her quickly, “A couple blocks down and around the corner.”

“Okay,” she whispered to establish his need for her approval.

Cosmo drove the car away slowly and pulled around the corner out of sight. He could monitor the house through the bushes at the corner. Kat and D.S. walked together around to the side door of the house. Cosmo thought about what he and Kat were hoping she could do in the house as the hit unfolded. She was intending to prevent him from killing Mrs. Templeton,

or at least to minimize the damage done to her. They were counting on the power of suggestion she had exerted over him at their last meeting when she deliberately gave him a contradictory message: “Do it if you must. But do not hurt her.”

And he said “Okay.”

D.S. carefully tested the side door. It felt locked to him. Kat whispered to him firmly, “Let me try it.” He looked at her closely, hesitated, and slowly yielded. She confidently turned the handle of the storm door, pulled it open quietly, opened the heavy inside door, and stepped through followed by D.S. They closed both doors slowly and silently. Inside she turned to face him to test him again and confirm her standing with him. She put her finger to her lips, hand-signaled to him to pause and listen for any sounds of stirrings in the house, and then directed him down the stairs to the basement. Again he looked at her closely, but followed her directions quickly. Kat was satisfied. His aura and emissions were settling into a steady state of quiet colors.

Cosmo was able to see the hesitation at the side door that had been unlocked by Templeton and the momentary delay. He relied on Kat to use it to her advantage. They had agreed that D.S. seemed to be in a state that made him subject to her advice, and that she should use the first chance, however small, to

establish her power over him. Only if necessary, would she try to get Billie to influence his actions once they got inside.

As they waited in the dark against an inside wall of the finished basement just off the steps coming down, Kat tried to catch D.S.'s eye. When her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she saw him slumped against the wall looking down, then staring straight ahead blankly. She knew she should press her advantage by establishing eye contact and staring him down, in effect, to confirm her influence over him.

They had talked about it and Cosmo urged her to do it. And to do so tactfully as soon as possible and as much as possible once they got inside.

“The guy is a coward and narcissist,” he told her. “He believes that he and his actions are good because they are directed for his best advantage. He thinks he’s always right. Use that to your advantage. Become that which is guiding him to goodness and success as much as you can.”

Kat tried staring intently at him in the diminishing darkness just to see if she could get a sense of what he was thinking, and maybe influencing his thoughts somehow. But there was nothing coming from his mind to hers, and his streams of color emissions were pulsing steadily. He was strangely deflated looking as he slumped passively against the wall.

She did, though, sense Billie's presence somewhere. It was similar to the change in air pressure she felt when first communing telepathically with her. If she were there with them now, it might help control D.S. and save Mrs. Templeton.

When they heard stirrings upstairs D.S. straightened up, looked quickly at Kat. She held her hand up to quiet and reassure him, cocked her head slightly listening, then nodded at him to relax again. She wanted him to understand that she was in charge. Then she noticed he was slowly and carefully tapping the 12-inch piece of rubber hose into his left hand. How much damage would that do to the victim that she could not prevent even if she could keep him from killing her?

Cosmo watched as the upper-class neighborhood began to come alive, and hoped he wouldn't be too noticeable or out of place. He was to see that no signs of the hit were evident outside the house, and to watch for anyone approaching who could foil the plan. In the case of the plan going awry, he was to be Kat's recourse for getting out as fast as possible. They were both concerned about the dangers of being caught up in a murder-for-hire if the plan spiraled completely out of control.

D.S. and Kat heard Templeton leave the house for his office and the three children shortly after him for

school. Then they waited impatiently for his phone call so Mrs. Templeton would come downstairs to the kitchen to answer it. They crept slowly up the basement stairs just short of the landing for the side door where they had entered hours before.

Then the phone rang, but no one came down into the kitchen to answer it. The ringing stopped, they heard Mrs. Templeton's voice upstairs in the bedroom, and then silence. D.S. and Kat looked at each other quickly, and D.S. started up the stairs into the kitchen. Kat quickly jumped in, touched his shoulder, and told him to stay put while she went up the stairs. He hesitated, and at the same time pulled the piece of leaded hose out of his pocket and tapped it into his left hand a couple times. He went along behind her; but he was getting antsy.

As Kat looked into the kitchen from the basement stairs, they heard Mrs. Templeton coming down, ducked back down the basement stairs, and crouched there silently. When they heard sounds in the kitchen they went in as quickly and quietly as they could. She was dressed and facing the stove with her back to them busily fixing morning coffee.

When she turned toward them, Kat commandingly and smoothly shushed her with her finger to her pursed lips. Mrs. Templeton froze in surprise and Kat quickly put her hand over her mouth, grabbed her

around the neck, and pulled her into an embrace. She told her they were only after money and to close her eyes so she couldn't identify them.

Kat then turned her around so her back was toward D.S. and signaled him with her eyes to stun her with his leaded piece of hose. She couldn't tell if he was angry or relieved about being told what to do, but she felt he would do as she directed. He jumped toward them, lifted his arm, but hesitated momentarily when Kat put her hand up. She pointed to the spot on the back of Mrs. Templeton's upper neck where he should hit her.

D.S.'s body aura and emanations were churning fast and darkening to purple and green; his eyes looked stricken and red. When he struck her, she wilted in Kat's arms, and she lowered her slowly to the floor. She lay on her for a moment while he moved back away from them both. Kat then whispered in Mrs. Templeton's ear as best she could that she should play dead if she wasn't unconscious already and trust her to save her from further attack and injury.

"Play dead... Let me save you... Don't make a sound."

She didn't know if Mrs. Templeton heard her, but she was sure D.S. hadn't because he had a hand over

his face and had backed away to the other side of the kitchen.

“Let’s get her upstairs. Go up and start the water in the tub. I’ll get her started up the stairs and we’ll undress her in the bathroom.”

D.S. looked up at Kat slowly. “Maybe she’s not dead, or unconscious.”

“That’s okay. She’ll be easier to get upstairs if she’s not completely out.”

He straightened up but stood still, unable to move.

“Get going. Make the water warm, not too hot or cold, so’s not to shock her awake. Get moving.”

She looked at him long and hard. He looked back at her with a quick flick of his eyes from under black hooded eyebrows. She was testing her power of suggestion over him. His body quivered with indecision. She flicked her head toward the stairs. He did as she said.

Kat breathed long and deep in relief, and watched him slowly go up the stairs looking back at her. She couldn’t quite read what was going on in his head, but his face showed a lot of doubt and a touch of resentment. Whether he would actually do what he was told without her being there, she had her doubts.

She looked down a long time at Mrs. Templeton on the kitchen floor. She tried whispering another warning to her, but could tell she was not conscious or

hearing her. She wasn't dead, though, one good thing, and there was no sign of blood, convulsions, or anything broken from the blow on her neck.

Kat couldn't know for sure what he would do once she got her upstairs into the bathroom. But she gained confidence from how he had accepted her suggestions and direction. She did know that she had to be ready for anything, though, plan or not. That was always the best plan, she knew -- "The readiness is all." And she decided she just might have to kill Cosmo for teaching her that line from Shakespeare.

As she dragged Mrs. Templeton from the kitchen and began to wrestle her up the stairs, she tried remembering some of the other lines from that passage. But she couldn't and knew she shouldn't. She just had to be ready for anything from D.S. and forget about Shakespeare or anybody else.

In the meantime, Cosmo was trying to be unobtrusive sitting in his car around the corner by pretending to be reading a map and keeping his head down. He was calming himself with some of his favorite lines that he often recited to himself in sticky situations: "We defy augury. There's a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come – the readiness is all."

He had a couple responses planned if anyone offered him help with directions. He was looking for the University of Minnesota. Or he was looking for a Cretin-Derham Hall High School somewhere in Portland Park where he had a job interview. And a few excuses to use if necessary. He was tired and lost and just taking a little rest while figuring things out.

He supposed that if someone approached him or even walked by looking at him curiously he could be reading a book. But why was he here at all, reading a book or not? And, oh yes, there was that other thing -- he didn't have a book with him, anyway.

He felt out of place so he knew he looked out of place. And guilty, too, as a designated getaway driver. But if worse came to worst, he tried to tell himself, "Men must endure their going hence even as their coming hither. Ripeness is all."

CHAPTER 16: An Emergency in the Neighborhood

Dragging Mrs. Templeton upstairs proved to be time consuming and awkward. Her body and head bounced on the carpeted steps. Kat used it to impress on D.S. the advantage of her being there to help him. To her he seemed a little more convinced of this than he'd been before. But she knew the real test of her power over him would come when he had to make sure she was dead -- and if she weren't, kill her.

In the roomy bathroom they began to draw her bath, which was to be her last. Or not. Mrs. Templeton was a short, slight woman with an aging and fatigued-looking face. She looked pale, thin, and worn for her age. There was a strained look about her mouth and eyes, as though she were in a constant state of inquiry and concern. She would not be thought of as much of a challenge to intimidate or control. So she seemed.

Starting to lift her into the tub seemed to stir her up, and she began to writhe and twist a little on the chilly, tiled floor. She moaned once and flailed out instinctively so suddenly and strongly that Kat and D.S. had to back away. She stopped and leaned forward on her elbows. Her eyes opened and slowly focused on them. They both froze for a minute until

Mrs. Templeton seemed to figure out what was happening. Then she started screaming at them with a fury surprising for her size.

“Who are you? What are you doing here? Get out.”

Kat had suspected that D.S. would be a bit of a coward about killing someone with his own hands face-to-face. Shooting someone in the back in the dark of night 25 feet away he might be capable of, but killing someone while looking in her eyes is quite another matter. His body aura and waves were pulsing irregularly and flashing bright multi-colors. It appeared to Kat that he was torn about what to do for sure.

Just then she sensed another presence in the bathroom. Sensed it before she saw it. It seemed to coalesce out of the few shadows left in the corners of the room. A young girl was standing motionless in the doorway of the bathroom. She was closely watching D.S. and Mrs. Templeton facing each other braced for action. Her body showed her interest and concern, but her face was calm and non-committal. Youthful, pretty, longhaired, open and innocent looking, wearing jeans and a fuzzy sweater, she was like an objective observer tallying events of interest to her.

Outside in the car around the corner, Cosmo thought he had glimpsed the movement of something

by the side door of the house. He couldn't be sure. Probably just the passing shadow of a bird or stray dog, a trick of the senses in the morning light. Perhaps, he thought, an uneasy spirit from a Dickens or Hawthorne story that he was imagining magically in this black, Gothic affair.

Kat knew immediately that it was Billie without ever having seen her before. She didn't know if D.S. saw or sensed her, or if it would have mattered to him if he had. But for Kat, the presence of Billie, or her spirit, supported her effort to prevent D.S. from killing Mrs. Templeton.

Mrs. Templeton stumbled to her feet and threw herself at D.S., striking out wildly but ineffectually at him with her small fists. He threw her violently, almost viciously, to the floor and looked around desperately. When she began to cry, he stumbled to the vanity counter, grabbed a nail file, and jumped on Mrs. Templeton, slashing at her on the floor. His first strikes scrapped along the terrazzo surface giving off small sparks that hit her face lying against the hard surface.

Kat screamed at him to stop, and lunged for his arm slashing at Mrs. Templeton on the floor. Then the hovering and watching Billie suddenly appeared between them, signaled Kat to stop, and turned to D.S., who was straddling the woman on his knees.

She touched his arm as he lifted it, stopping it in mid-stroke.

“Lemme be. Get your hands off me. Let me finish her.”

He looked up at Billie’s image standing over him as though pleading for an injured friend collapsed on the ground. Kat saw the pulsing aura and darkening streaks of light surrounding him. Together they were like a religious tableau of a fallen victim, a prostrate lover, and an avenging angel. So far in the murder-for-hire hit, Billie and Kat seemed to have succeeded in their improbable injunction to D.S. – attack the victim if you must, but “Do not hurt her.”

Then D.S. suddenly raised his arm again and slashed downward with the nail file into the right side of Mrs. Templeton’s neck. It remained stuck there straight up in the air for a minute. When he was able to pull it back out he jerked his hand away and rolled off her onto his right side and lay gasping on the terrazzo floor.

Kat and Billie rushed toward him to grab the file and keep him away from her. Blood oozing from her neck wound was making the terrazzo floor slippery. Mrs. Templeton rolled back and forth in pain while they were grappling with D.S. Then she struggled to her feet and stumbled out the door and down the hall to her bedroom.

She was trying to put on a bathrobe when they came in after her. D.S. took the PPK Walther pistol out of an inside pocket and pointed it at her within inches of her face. His arm was straight out and stiff as though trying to fend her off from attacking him. Kat and Billie seemed to have lost what influence they had on him.

“You don’t have to do this. My husband can help you. He’s a lawyer, he can help you,” she burred through the blood in her throat.

He was shaking and frantic looking, as though she posed a danger to him that had to be eliminated. Kat and Billie couldn’t get his attention and Kat saw waves of black and red emissions pulsing powerfully from him. Billie put her hand on the Walther PPK, but couldn’t get him to lower it away from Mrs. Templeton’s head. He seemed to be possessed, and neither of them could read anything other than almost blind fear and rage from him.

Billie jumped in front of Mrs. Templeton to protect her. D.S. blinked, did a double take, looked down at the floor, and then back up at them. His lips were quivering. He pulled the trigger. Nothing. He slapped the gun with his left hand and pulled the trigger again. Nothing but a click.

Mrs. Templeton then moved toward him, he hit her with the butt of the pistol, and then tried to eject

the magazine and reload the gun. She staggered past him while he tried to grab her with one hand, but there was too much blood from her neck and she slipped out of his grasp. She stumbled along the hall and down the stairs to the main floor entryway. He caught up with her as she was trying to undo the chain lock on the front door. She screamed, he slammed the door, and hit her again with the butt of the pistol.

Kat had followed D.S. out of the bathroom and down the stairs to the front hallway. Billie was already there trying unsuccessfully to stop him from hitting her repeatedly with the gun handle. For a moment he was distracted as though he were hearing voices, and looked around wildly.

Mrs. Templeton pulled off her diamond ring and thrust it at him.

“Take this, take this, get out,” she said in a weak, gargling voice as she sank to her knees on the floor.

He took the ring, looked at it blindly, and dropped it. Then he hit her again with the butt of the gun. The fancy, hand-made grip broke off and the trigger guard bent. He paused.

“Oh, God” she said, and sank further to the floor leaning on her arms.

Billie and Kat were able to stop him temporarily at this point, and Kat could see his emanations and aura quieting down a little. He held back some as Mrs.

Templeton crouched in a helpless-looking bundle on the floor. He stared at her, looked around frantically, and then walked quickly back into the kitchen. He returned with a paring knife in his hand.

Kat and Billie moved toward Mrs. Templeton to try to protect her. Kat saw no aura from her as she crouched on the floor in front of the door, but D.S. was giving off bright flashing colors again. He moved toward her with the knife and a blank look on his face. As he raised the knife, Kat began shouting at him.

“Remember D.S., ‘Do not hurt her. Do not hurt her.’”

Looking confused and tormented, he stopped in front of her and glanced quickly at Kat and Billie. Billie took hold of his arm with the knife in it, and he seemed to have to force himself to start stabbing feebly at Mrs. Templeton. Kat and Billie were able to redirect some of the blows from her neck to her shoulders and back. He continued stabbing until the blade broke off in her neck and stuck straight up in the air. They pushed her flat on the floor and Billie lay on top of her to protect her as best she could.

When he saw Billie lying on top of her and heard Kat yell again, he stopped. He stared at the two of them on the floor. He watched the blood wash down Mrs. Templeton’s back and onto the hardwood entryway floor. Poking at the slowly spreading

streams of blood on the floor with his shoe, he looked at the paring knife handle in his hand as though surprised by it. He let it slip slowly from his hand.

He looked curiously at his bloody hands, at Kat and Billie, and at Mrs. Templeton unmoving on the floor. Then he went back upstairs to the master bedroom. There he ransacked the room scattering everything about as though a robbery had occurred. After that he went to the second floor bathroom, and tried to wash the blood off himself as best he could.

Kat and Billie attended to Mrs. Templeton's injuries and saw that many were cuts on her back and not stab wounds. Her neck wound had stopped bleeding, but still had the broken blade of the paring knife protruding from it. Kat asked her if she could walk, but all she could do was look at them and try to rise to her knees. They eased her to her feet, unhooked the front door safety chain, and helped her slowly limp out of the house onto the front steps. She pulled her blue terrycloth robe around herself and started walking slowly toward a neighbor's house. Kat and Billie watched her closely as she left a trail of blood across the lawn to a neighbor's door. She knocked at two neighbors' houses before one answered and took her inside.

Kat meantime went down the service walk, crossed the street, and watched to be sure that Mrs.

Templeton was taken into a neighbor's house. Then she walked calmly but quickly through the mid-morning chill down the block and around the corner to Cosmo's car. He'd been watching all this but said nothing when she got in and sank into the passenger seat. She closed her eyes for a moment and appeared ready to cry. She had so much to tell Cosmo but couldn't talk yet.

They didn't leave until D.S. came out the side door and walked casually down the block in the opposite direction. He appeared to be wiping his hands together before stuffing them into his coat pockets. Kat saw only very faint yellow and red waves and a quiet, settled body aura given off by him as he passed unnoticed down the street. He never looked back. As they drove away, an ambulance passed them on its way to some accident or emergency in the neighborhood. They never looked back either.

CHAPTER 28: House of Spirits

Detective Strangler paid a visit to the Wahls' house now closed up and being readied for sale. The bank was in no hurry to try to unload it considering the infamy around the neighborhood. And a foreclosure and short sale could be in the works due to the Wahls' lack of attention in recent years to financial matters. It remained largely the way it was that night when the police were called and the coroner took Wilma and Willard away.

Everything he saw in the front living room and two back bedrooms confirmed what they'd all said about their attempts to contact Billie in the so-called séance. Someone had apparently pulled the blankets up on the double bed in the bedroom where Mr. and Mrs. Wahl had died and tried to neaten things up a bit. A curious domestic touch considering the circumstances. Someone cared about the house and the people.

He scribbled on a scrap of paper from his pocket, "Note to self: Who here after coroner? Why anyone if undetermined death? Look into." Then he told himself, "I've got to start using my official detective notebook one of these days. Enough with these scraps

of paper that end up little paper pills in the bottom of my pocket.”

In the other bedroom, the cot was still there fairly close to the door with blood on it and bits of the broken kitchen cooking twine scattered under it. First time my preparing the turkey for roasting at Thanksgiving ever paid off other than putting pounds on me, he thought. Why cooking twine? He noticed the stereo set was still on, and found how to replay the most recent music. “Light My Fire,” “Burning Love,” and “Scar Tissue” started playing loud enough that he had to turn down the volume. He wondered why it hadn’t been turned off. Oversight, or just incompetence, or deliberately turned back on by someone?

Even the tools were still spread out on the bed atop the sandpaper where the Wahls had apparently put them for use on that kid, D.S. They took on a new, disturbing aspect when seen as implements for torturing a human being. Strangler wondered what a portable, high-power drill would’ve been used for on someone tightly tied to a simple camping cot... and helpless.

He thought of a movie or a book he’d read where a Nazi spy laid out a roll of dentistry tools and drilled into the tooth of an innocent Ph.D. student to extract information. It was a scene he’d never imagined or

ever forgotten. The worst nightmare of a lot of people who may never have used a drill in their lives.

Tied to that was his childhood memory of receiving gas in a dentist chair with a rubber mask and trying to spit with numb lips into a small, round sink of swirling water. He imagined drilling into someone's live tooth, but surely not an innocent history major grad student. Then he felt again his regret about not trying graduate school after college. Wonder what it would've been like? Water over the dam.

"Give it up, Les," he told himself again as he had so many other times. "You've got work to do now. Les is more." But he wondered if something in this room somehow prompted such brooding thoughts of self-analysis and regret. More water over the dam.

As he fingered the weird array of work tools on the bed, he felt a kind of sympathy with the grieving parents and would-be torturers. He could see himself doing what they were planning to do to someone who killed a child of his. Or worse.

The silence and emptiness of this otherwise ordinary house seemed to be opening him to personal emotions he hadn't felt in a long time. There was an eerie and otherworldly atmosphere in the room. Strangler shivered a little and turned the odd feelings

into something to be figured out, as he often did to avoid having to examine his behavior.

“This must’ve been the girl Billie’s bedroom,” he thought to himself as he took in the smallish desk and chair alongside the bed and the pictures on the wall. “Congratulations, Captain Obvious” jumped into his head for an instant. In cases like these, he tended to recite potential evidence to himself no matter how minor and mundane.

The room wasn’t particularly girlie, he thought, for her having spent so much of her short teenage life in it. But wha’do I know about teenage girls. Still, he sensed there was something more than an ordinary young girl’s life here. He wondered where she kept her secrets, and if they had survived her sudden death, somehow. He doubted it, but couldn’t shake the possibility.

There were more than the usual vibes that he couldn’t quite dismiss in Billie’s bedroom. It seemed to become warm, but he shivered again, and saw what looked like warm, slightly pulsating emissions coming from the walls. He distinctly sensed a presence here different from most of his typical detective intuitions. Instead of his usual hunches, he found himself engaged in imaginings about Billie and her parents – as though something or someone were directing his thoughts.

D. S.'s words came back to him about that Kat telling him how to open himself to communicating with the dead Billie -- by simply listening for her to talk to him in his head. So he gave that a try for a minute or two. Eventually, though, he spoke aloud to the room.

“By God, someone’s getting into my head. Whoever you are let me see you.”

Strangely, no one else being in the house freed him to talk to someone, anyone, himself, without self-consciousness or feeling like a doofus. He trusted there’d be no answer. But just speaking out loud, hearing his own voice, banished the ghosts and reassured him that he was truly there and not dreaming or hallucinating. Not the first time he talked to himself. Or the last, likely.

But then someone answered him, at least in his head. He closed his eyes to test his senses and focus his brain. No help there. Nothing. When he opened his eyes, there she was. Standing by her desk and chair.

Was he seeing her in his brain or in her bedroom? He couldn’t see her eyes, but could feel them looking at him. Almost like a touch from her mind that he could feel on his body. He could tell she was smiling at him more by feel than sight. He felt a sliver of quickening fright but not fear.

He blinked and shook his head. Still there. “Are you really there, and if so what the hell’s going on?”

“If you’re seeing me, I’m here.”

“But in my head or in... here?” and he spread his arms out toward her and the entire room.

“Does it matter?”

“No, I guess not. Unless you’re my hallucination.”

“I’m not.”

“And I don’t believe in visions or apparitions or ghosts. So I guess you’re here. Here or not, what have you got to say for yourself?”

She looked young, long dark hair pulled back, with an open, friendly face, not at all ghostly or ghastly.

“D. S. Arschloch. Do you know his story?”

“What about him? I’m learning it slowly but surely.”

“Be sure to get it all before you feel too sorry for him.”

“Like what?”

“My parents were trying to bring justice to him in this room in their own way is what you have to know. They almost succeeded. I stopped them.” Here she seemed to glow a little as though giving off heat.

“Why?”

“I didn’t want them to be considered murderers, even mistakenly. Not even for me.”

“Did you kill them?”

“No, and neither did he. They killed themselves with a slow-acting poison. But they misjudged the time it would take to torture and kill him because they didn’t know what they were doing,” she told Strangler.

“In more ways than one.”

“Yes. But there are some who do know what they’re doing who are still trying.”

“I kind of thought so. You here to help me stop them?” he asked.

“No.”

“I thought not.”

“Like mud,” she said.

“Like mud! Like mud? How about fiddlesticks? My foot? My left foot? How do you know those sayings?”

“I’m here to settle up with him for what he did to my parents, and only incidentally for what he did to me, which you don’t know the half of.”

“Like mud. You know I can’t let you do that.”

“Fiddlesticks! Do you think you can stop it? But you can be in on it if you want to be.”

“What do you mean? I’m a cop. I can’t do that. Or allow it.”

“My left foot!”

“You know very well I’m here to get some answers about your parents’ deaths, not contribute to another one.”

Then he suddenly shook his head, brought himself up short, and said, “Godfrey Daniel! Here I am arguing with an hallucination of some kind about helping her with a possible murder.”

“I told you – I’m not your hallucination. You can’t help or hinder. But you can be part of the process of appropriate punishment that will be coming soon.”

“You mean like a trial?”

“Something like that, but no judges, no jury, no lawyers... just me, him, and any others directly involved.”

“Who would that be then? That Kat and the Professor who were here that night for most of your so-called séance before they left?”

“Okay by me. They’re involved more than you know, maybe.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised. I suspected as much.”

“Like mud you did.”

“You may be right. But then you’re a ghost or an apparition -- and what am I doing talking to a ghost, anyway.”

“I told you – I’m not a ghost or apparition.”

She moved toward the bed with its spread of hand tools that her father had taught her to use and take care of.

”See how these things are well-kept, even shiny, like they were new? They taught me how and when to use each one properly, for the right job, at the right time. They taught me right. They didn’t lose their minds when he killed me. They didn’t go mad. They just lost interest in everything else, became more coldly rational than ever, and invented whatever they needed to justify getting him. They eked along waiting for the chance to use what resources they had left to do the right job at the right time.

“They just slipped gradually into revenging my death as their job in life to do the best way they could – like getting dressed in the morning or cooking a trussed up turkey. And that meant they were going mad, maybe, but just not obviously so.”

Billie told Strangler they were taking over the house for a while, and that her parents’ deaths indirectly caused by D.S. would be settled up, as well as the others.

“Wait a minute. What others?”

“Well, mine... and that woman in Portland Park who was attacked in her house.”

“The hit-for-hire? She didn’t die.”

“She may as well have. She’ll never be the same.”

“Okay, point taken. How do you know about that, anyway?”

“I was there. We all were.”

“What? You were there? That’s still unsolved.”

“We’re going to take care of all of it once and for all. In this house where my parents are able to be hanging around for awhile yet until they clear waivers to move on.”

“Why here?”

“You haven’t noticed? The longer you’re here the more susceptible you become to the spirit world around you. And to me. Aren’t you feeling it?”

“Well, I guess I am accepting that you’re actually here in front of me, I’m really talking to you, and all this is really happening. But I’m not really an accepting kind of guy.”

“Oh yes you are. And I’m reading you better and better as you accept me and this world and my ability to communicate with you. I must say you are more accepting and understanding than I thought you’d be.”

“Thanks, I think. Why do you need me?”

“We don’t, but you can be here if you wish. Two birds with one stone sort of thing.”

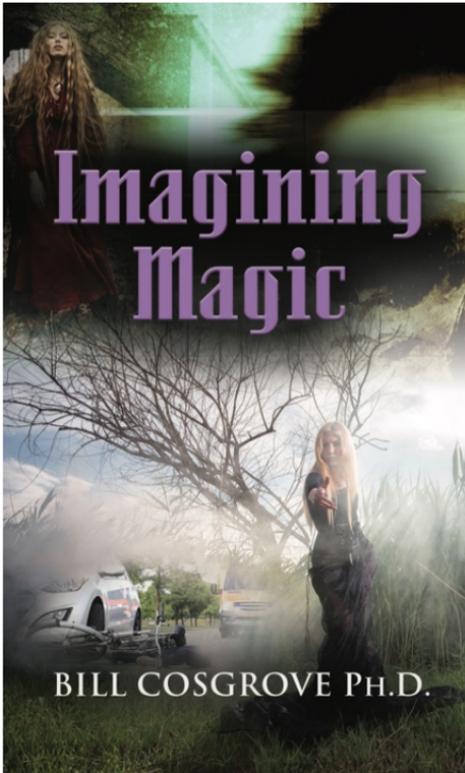
“What if I told you I don’t believe any of this... I’m dreaming or drugged or something? And you’re just a figment. A mere figment. Not really here.”

Imagining Magic

“I’d tell you that you don’t really believe that, and you’re bluffing and rationalizing.”

“I don’t do that and wouldn’t ever do that.”

“Like mud!”



D.S. Arschloch's high school girlfriend is pregnant. His solution qualifies him to become a youthful hit man for petty criminal Rocky Conigliaro. But an enterprising, mind reading Kat O'Callahan, her former college professor Cosmo Grove, and the ghost of D.S.'s late girlfriend hook up to try to bring him to a strange kind of justice.

Imagining Magic

by Bill Cosgrove, Ph.D.

Order the complete book from the publisher

[Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/9988.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**