

Which Witch



Annie Warren

A "New Woman" Novel

Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Which Witch

...is Which?

By Annie Warren

Chapter 1: The Search for Knowledge

I have to make a decision. The time has finally come, and, since my sabbatical leave from the University is about to expire, I have to decide what I am going to do. From my studies made during this leave of absence from the university,

my mind has been filled with knowledge that I'd never even dreamed of when this 'extracurricular' project had started. But now is the time for decision. My mind is in a frenzy on how to decide!

Maybe, if I try to reconstruct my thoughts at the start of the project and review what has happened, then perhaps I can decide, for the decision is not to be taken lightly. It is an all-encompassing 'all or nothing' question. I must answer it but don't know what to say. . .

. . .

So, back to the roots of it all, before any of this arose.

To begin with, who am I?

I am reasonably sure that I am still Professor Kevin Evans, professor of psychology at the University. I did my doctoral dissertation in parapsychology and the paranormal. For 2 years I've had tenure at the University, no small task in itself. Now, as a professor in psychology, I teach mostly the run-of-the mill psychology courses but still do my research in the area of my doctoral.

Although I learned to listen to subjects in studies and cases when I was a student myself, one of the things that I have also learned is to listen to my students and what they say. Not many professors do this nowadays. I mean I listen to what they say, above and beyond just their questions on the lecture material. Actually, I've found that most people don't really listen to you when you talk with them. They are more preoccupied with their own problems and lives to listen with more than half an ear to what you are saying, unless it really involves them closely.

Listening to students can be done both directly and indirectly. Some tell me things and others just sort of say things that are interesting, like passing on the stories of other students while talking perhaps on an entirely different subject. You have to learn to listen and listen well. Many of my students come to beg for answers to burning questions (like "what are you going to be asking on the next exam"), while others come to ask for some of the finer points on lecture material and end up "chatting" on other things too. Anyway, they are not always the ones to ask all of the questions, if you know what I mean about picking up information!

In this case, some rumors led me to carry out an investigation. For often, rumors like the myths of old have somewhere in them the grains

of truth that can lead to further knowledge, especially in the paranormal. My investigations, however, turned out to get “hot,” requiring me to do a proper follow up; that is why I took the sabbatical leave that I’ve been on for the past year. Now, as I said, it is running out and I must make a decision on which my career, my whole life will depend. What should I do?

• • •

The whole affair actually began well over a year ago. I was slightly upset when one of the male faculty underwent a sex change operation and then, as a woman, had been accepted back into the faculty. He, now she, was sure to have large classes until the novelty wore off. I suppose that perhaps there was a tinge of jealousy? Of course there was; most of the male faculty was jealous of anyone getting “instantaneous” notoriety and the large classes that went with it. but none of them would take such a drastic step to do it. Notoriety of this variety comes quickly while the rest of us usually have to slog, work, research and publish in hopes of a tenth of that sort of fame. But, most importantly to me was that to my ears came murmurs and “comments” and rumors that all that had gone on had not been medical.

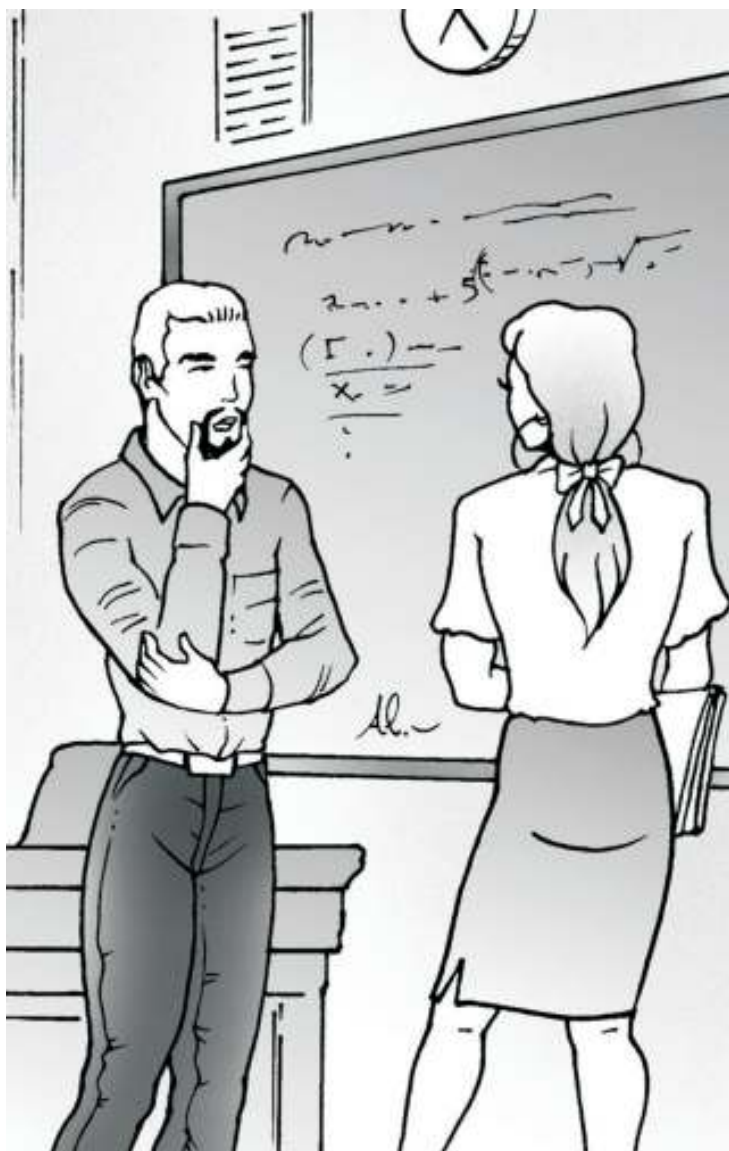
In listening to rumors, one must be able to sift for usefulness and the possibility purely of truth, even if bizarre. Almost all rumors are useless for my purposes but what I was hearing smacked of the paranormal. It turned out that in this case, the rumors involving the transsexual had been false, but I found that out only later after investigating. To me, at the time that I first heard the rumors, it seemed very likely to me to have some flavor of the paranormal; after all, that a man would want to become a woman in the first place I found to be incredible, if not ludicrous. The fact that some form of paranormal could actually have been involved seemed to be likely, at least to *my* way of thinking and so my curiosity was piqued, enough to follow up. Thus I decided to investigate; such rumors have to be checked out. As a first step, I went to see the “new” professor and interviewed him/her, ostensibly on the basis of the psychological and, of course, any possible internal parapsychologicals too.

Actually s/he was not that bad looking, was soft-spoken and quite open, all things considered. From the very start, s/he denied categorically any and all links to any form of paranormal activity such as ESP, witchcraft, ethereal voices, or even the Hand of God, well, other than His making a mistake in her/his original case, a mistake that s/he had now corrected. I had not

known him before her “conversion”, other than having seen him occasionally on campus. But the “she” that I now saw both looked and acted totally the part of a woman. I know it was silly of me, but I took a malicious sort of a joy in stroking my short beard as I talked to her. She, of course, took no notice of it.

I learned all I could from her. Actually, some interesting data that I collected could possibly lie on the periphery of the paranormal, but only slightly, not being enough to do any follow-up or research on. When I left, I almost sighed in relief to be free from her. Because of her crossing the sex/gender boundary I felt that she was weird in some way, but on the other hand, on the whole she was an altogether nice person, just one that I was not overly anxious to know any better. Besides, as with most men outside of the overly macho, I’m sure, she shook the foundations of my own masculinity, not a terribly hard thing to do.

You see, those foundations were easily shaken since I was smallish in stature, almost delicate. My hair was long but I did have my beard, sparse though it may have been. A great deal of effort and a lot of time had been put into growing and nurturing it. I was 28 and single. No one, it seems, ever took me seriously sexually. Refusals were legion. I could get used to being



small, but not to being refused so often. At least in psychology, I was in a “contact discipline,” that is, a person-oriented scientific field wherein I met many people. I was not a lecher or a dirty old man; I was just more lonely than a loner.

Well, the interview had panned out badly in terms of getting any leads or information to further my studies. The rumor mill, when turned properly with casual, sometimes flippant or even sometimes obtuse manipulation, had also turned up a name and even an address in connection with the transsexual that I would also have to check out, even though she had denied any such connections. Sometimes, as is so often the case, as I said before, in rumors is often concealed a grain of truth. The truth may have nothing to do with the rumor directly but can have a bearing on other questions that need answering. Some people may call it prying; I just call it intense investigative manipulation (yeah, prying). Casual but very pointed questions to the unsuspecting can often reveal a lot more than that person may have been willing to give up. Beating about a bush can flush a bird, you know, and if you beat the right bush, it may flush more than one bird and the second bird may be the one you are looking for!

The question of parapsychology in this case boiled down to the question as to whether or not

the occult was involved in any way in the wo/man's life and conversion. Some said that s/he had been influenced by or helped (warped?) by occult, citing witchcraft as the force that had been involved in the sex change, which, again, had been thoroughly denied. Even more usefully, however, there was the citing of the *who* that had been responsible, the (alleged) witch herself.

My interview with the transsexual had yielded a personal history, spotty though it was, of the person from early childhood into manhood (and then womanhood?). There were no so such manipulations as far as I could see, so I put the question in respect to him/her out of my mind. But the person cited in the rumor was a person who just might have those other talents and/or that special knowledge that I could capitalize on, if there was any trace of truth in the rumor. She too would have to be investigated, researched to find if there was truth in it or if it was just some person's way of trying to "get even" with someone else by slander and malicious, detracting, rumor mongering (also another form of "truth" to be found in rumors, though not usually useful). It could turn out to be a false name, a false address, or, if these were accurate, it could just be some housewife whose only witching had to do with putting Witch Hazel on poison ivy rashes for her children, or some other such "normal" per-

son. But, as the saying goes, “Leads is Leads” and I’d have to at least go look.

I should probably say at this point that my original dissertation had been on a form of testing for telekinesis. If you don’t know that term, it means moving objects by mental energy alone, not touching them. But, once you have that magic sheepskin with the Ph.D. letters on it, you don’t have to limit yourself to that one area of research but can do other things that are related (or not, if your college or university will allow it). I felt that I had more or less exhausted the telekinetic field (or had lost the driving interest) and had branched out into other areas of the paranormal to include some delving into occult and occult-related studies. I was always learning and never seemed to learn enough. Here was the possibility of a new tack, looking at another phase of that broad field, new to me, that is, if there was any basis of truth in the rumor.

Chapter 2: The Meeting and Greeting of Minds

I don’t have any special first time impressions of the house at the ‘rumored’ address since I spent so much time there and, besides, there was nothing particular to set it apart from any or

all of the other houses on that block. No, it did not have gingerbread trimming, nor did it have a besom parked just outside the door (or inside the door, for that fact). Only when you went up the short flight of steps and got to the front door and saw the small plaque that said “**M. Pat Hurley, Services**” was there any notable difference — and then only when you got *way* up close. Even when I was asked in and saw the interior, there was nothing out of place for any average home.

Pat, herself, was not a remarkable or overly unique person either. There was nothing in the cool “normal” facade that I saw to hint about what went on underneath — good, bad or otherwise. She met me at the door when I knocked and invited me in when she learned that I was from the university. She had also bristled noticeably when I mentioned the rumor. I explained how I was researching phenomena that deal with the paranormal as it was a part of my academic specialty. I did not say more than that, nor what my inner thoughts were on the source of the rumor, the transsexual professor, and she did not pry. To her, I was taking an opportunity to pursue my research as I had said — a normal enough thing for a university professor to do. Although she had bristled at the rumor, it turned out that it was because it was a rumor that she was annoyed. But then, when I queried about the content; that is, if it was perhaps not a ru-

mor, she became defensive and elusive, neither wholly denying it nor admitting that it was the truth. We started a small verbal fencing match.

She became edgy at the question of paranormal. When I asked what she did, what were the services indicated on the door, she also hedged and tried to be evasive. I could see in her face and in particular in her eyes that she was parrying my questions but it seemed that there was some sort of debate going on within herself while at the same time she was sizing me up.

To sidetrack the question at least for a bit, she offered me coffee, which I accepted, knowing that it was a diversion, but knowing it would also give me more time to ask questions. When she went off to the kitchen, I looked around the room and saw nothing out of place for a modern home. There was a TV, a boombox type stereo and a VCR. A small bookcase had a number of mystery novels, a dictionary and number of other references common to the home. When she came back, she placed a cup and saucer in front of me and she resumed her seat opposite me and looked at me with the same intensity as before.

The coffee was delicious and allowed for more bantering as we both drank it. When she plied me with questions about my position and interest in the occult—a sort of odd thing to do

as I just repeated myself—I asked back my questions. It was like back to Square One. However, while we sipped the coffee almost to the bottom of the cup, there seemed to be an almost physical snap as she apparently came to an answer to her inner turmoil and suddenly started answering my questions in a straightforward manner. When it came to her connection with the paranormal, she still hedged, but only long enough to get assurances of anonymity in my researches, a condition that I readily agreed to, saying that it was standard practice with such researches, unless she, herself, specifically released me to use her name. At the term “release,” she smiled and became agreeable beyond what I had hoped. The last dregs of the coffee were forgotten.

Gradually, what came out in the course of the interview was that, yes, she was a form of witch, sort of a modern day shaman, a dealer in potions, spells, certain limited precognitive and post-cognitive talents, and, perhaps best said for my research, a godsend in an area that was then out of my range of specific knowledge; I would be able to expand my knowledge and perhaps that of parapsychology at the same time. One curious thing, though, when I asked that she be an object for me to study, she agreed but only if I too could become an object for *her* to study. To anyone in the field of scientific endeavor, such reciprocal agreements are common when there is an

actual cross-purposed range of knowledge in the two individuals, be they persons or institutions. The only bars to that lie often in professional jealousies over conflicting research interests. Here, however, was a dealer in a branch of the occult and paranormal who wanted to know more about me and what I knew, or so I thought. I saw no problem with the agreement.

We parted that first day without really learning much about each other or each other's fields, but we had an appointment to meet the next evening when, as she put it, "we can begin our researches." I left the house in good spirits. My grumbles with the university were behind me. As a horse with the bit in his teeth, I had a project that would increase my knowledge, expand my consciousness. Even from my youngest days I had been imbued by my parents with this drive to expand my horizons, an almost insatiable desire to learn. My middle name must have really been Curiosity. Before going home, I stopped at the university library and got a handful of books dealing specifically with the topic of witchcraft. I had never browsed there as I had always been too busy elsewhere. Now I had a reason and I pursued it. On our next meeting I would not be totally unknowledgeable.

The books, it turned out, said very little, only nibbling at the periphery of the subject. It was

akin to a worm trying to make a serious dent on this country's national forest reserves. They felt the outline of the subject but only speculated on the contents, the inner heart and lore of the subject. The more I read, the more curious I became. If I could learn more, I could perhaps publish articles, increasing the realms of scientific knowledge as well as appeasing the university's insatiable demands that the professors constantly publish. Of course, there was also that little bird chirping the fact that I might even make a name for myself. If I went on sabbatical, I would be spared the university's demand but could nonetheless publish, if the feeling and knowledge were there. The problem would be getting the data without upsetting her. That might prove to be a trick.

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At the appointed time, I was again knocking at her door. She opened it and let me in. Again she was "normal." When I commented on this, she laughed, saying that these were modern times. Her trade did not have any special uniform except when teaching, learning, or for some specified high rituals. For normal activities, there were no peaked hats nor long black flowing robes. Furthermore, the brooms in her closets were strictly for sweeping, . . . most of the time.

She wouldn't comment on the rest of the time, evading the question with an irrepressible twinkle in her eye.

Perhaps I should pause here to explain something about the two of us that will make future developments clearer. We were roughly the same size, I being perhaps a couple of inches taller than she. Since I was small for a man, she was about the right size for a woman. Her hair was like mine, raven black and straight, only hers was longer. Mine rested easily on my shoulders or a bit longer, a practice of mine that more than once got me called an "educated hippie left over from the 60's," despite my young age. Hers was a marvelous stream that fell well down her back. It was the only thing that detracted from the "frumpy housewife" image. Well, not frumpy; she was plain but in a pretty way and her skirt, blouse, hose and mid-heeled shoes were very tasteful. No, frumpy would be a true misnomer in her case though she did have an image that no doubt was designed to fit in with the rest of the women in the suburban area in which she lived. I doubt that I would have fit into that neighborhood, for I, of course, had my beard, worn with some sort of macho pride. I was also wearing the standard professorial uniform required by the university protocol: suit and tie. Like I said, she was dressed in a comfortable skirt and blouse

combination, looking for all the world like suburban housewife. Only she wasn't.

We talked of many things that evening over at least two pots of tea. She, however, kept evading my pointed questions by answering in general, answering with information that I could have (or had) gotten from the books in the library. As I pressed more, showing more and more interest, her attitude began to change. Fewer were the vague answers with the laughs or smiles. Finally, fairly late into the evening, she fixed me with a cool stare instead of answering a question on the teaching of witchcraft to neophytes.

“Well, Kevin, you have shown an above average, *far* above average interest in witches and witchcraft. In term of learning the ins and outs of the trade, are you really interested in how one learns the trade?”

“Isn't that what I just asked?”

She smiled, not breaking the fixed stare. “Not exactly. You asked about teaching, not learning. I asked back if you were that interested in learning the trade. Do you really want to find out how one learns to be a practicing witch?”

I noted the subtle change in the question. I did want to learn more about it, but was she offering to teach *me*? I had to follow up on this one for sure. “Yes, I am most interested in learning all I can about the trade.”

“You must realize that there are certain dangers and modifications that would have to be faced and made to learn it. Would you want to face them and overcome them and, at the same time, learn the trade?”

Here was an opportunity that I had not even dared to hope for. She had spent all evening evading my questions and now was making a complete turnaround, saying that if I wanted to, I could learn the *whole trade, learn all there was to be learned or at least as much as she could teach me!* In a flash my mind soared as I pondered the scope of the knowledge I could learn, the papers I could publish. Played right, I could even wrangle a professorship out of this, maybe move to one of the really prestigious universities instead of the state university that I taught at. It was a unique opportunity that I simply could not pass up.

“If you are willing to teach me, I am willing to try to learn.”

At this, her face broke into a wide grin and her eyes sparkled with mirth. “All right, Kevin, you can become my apprentice. Let’s seal it with a special tea.”

She arose and got a really small pot, about the size for one cup. She put hot water into it and placed it on a sideboard near the kitchen over a single candle heater that would eventually bring it almost to a boil. Into it she then placed various leaves from a number of jars and bottles from a conveniently placed spice rack, stirring them in gently while mumbling quietly to herself. When it was finished, she brought it over to me, pouring it into my almost empty cup. The aroma was delicious. It smelled of cinnamon and mint. It tasted as marvelously as it smelled too, one of the finest herbal teas I had ever had. I offered her some but she said that I had made the decision so I would be allowed to celebrate.

As she sipped her tea in a toast, our eyes met over the rims of the cups. Hers were softer now but still sparkling and twinkling with an inner mirth that I did not understand at the time. As for me, I was in a sort of seventh heaven. I was to be afforded a most unique opportunity. No one had ever published such data before. I was almost assured of fame and fortune in the field of occult and parapsychology. I could not believe

my luck. Only, at that time, I was not really aware of what my total luck really was.

As the evening closed, she bade me good night, telling me to be there the next day at 9 am sharp. I agreed, saying that I hoped I would be able to make it that early. She only smiled, knowingly, saying that I would have no problem.

Chapter 3: The Beginnings

In the morning I was somewhat surprised when I awoke before the alarm. Also, I noticed that I seemed to be quite alert. Instead of the normal moan and groan to rise, I got readily out of bed and did my morning toilet, dressed and had breakfast way before the time I was due to show up. It was an unusual experience that I chocked up to my eagerness to get started on the new study project. I knew I wanted to learn and was eager to start but hadn't thought that I was *that* eager!

With this eagerness and earliness, there was absolutely no problem in being exactly on the dot at her door . She opened immediately to my knock and smiled warmly at me and welcomed me into the vestibule, commenting on how the call spell never failed. I, of course, was a bit

taken aback by this. There was a spell? When was it made? I asked her this as I followed her into her living room. She said she had made it while brewing the novice potion. Potion? What novice potion? I suddenly realized that in a way I had been had. The tea was not a tea but a potion. That and the spell she had cast were working on me even as I listened to her explain in detail the words of the spell and the desired action of the potion. Her only comment on it being a “mint tea” had been added to the potion on a sort of “a little bit of sugar helps the medicine go down” explanation. I couldn’t argue as it had been very tasty indeed!

She closed with “and the spell is similar in a way to asking a Jinni as a first wish to have unlimited continued wishes. Only, since you now know it and of it, you can break it with no ill effects, but it would take some conscious effort on your part. The casual soul would not think of breaking it and the truly weak soul could not without help or a counter-spell. I knew when I first saw you that you have a good, strong aura and that you could easily counter it.”

I had to ponder that one. The call spell was simple if not a bit long. The potion had ensured that I would have a more open mind than usual — she did not really have to use it — but it was still an open question.

You will note here, Gentle Reader, that I did not repeat the spell to you. I know it now by heart, it and probably a thousand more. But in my current state, I cannot write down one word of the spell. I found that out that evening when I tried to. The pen scratched but nothing would come of it. But more on this later; suffice it to say that neither the spells used and their explanations nor any of the contents of the potions are to be found in this narrative for a multitude of reasons. If you are reading this to learn them, then read no farther as there are none here.

After we had discussed the spell and the potion, she got up and got what I had thought looked like a regular spice rack. She then put it on the table and began brewing another “tea” while intoning another spell. She told me not to interrupt her, that she would explain it after it was completed. When it was done, she offered me the cup. I, of course, had to ask what it was, a question that she was expecting.

“This is the second potion for the initiate with an added spell for continuance. You have to be told this at this time so that you can make a decision. The spell is on the potion and will be transferred to whomever takes the potion and drinks it with free will and knowledge of its workings. Without this knowledge, it is but a cup of tea.