

## Excerpt from “The Witch’s Ladder”

Dana E. Donovan © 2009

Lilith reached behind her neck again, this time gathering her hair up into a ponytail. She tied it off with a hair tie resembling a miniature witch’s ladder. “We have work to do here,” she said to me, bluntly. “If you would like to stay and observe, then perhaps you can have a seat. If not, I’m sure Doctor Lieberman will ask you to leave.”

I looked at Doctor Lieberman. “Would you mind, Doctor?”

He gestured subtly, motioning toward an empty chair. I nodded and took the seat without comment.

Valerie, meanwhile, recovered from her ordeal with the psychometry experiment. She appeared drained and slightly disoriented still, but in time, pulled herself together enough to participate in the next experiment.

Lilith called for everyone’s attention, and received it undivided. “All right, folks. I am going to attempt to conjure up a thought-form. I will need everyone’s help, even yours, Detective Marcella.”

“Mine?” I pointed at myself. “Really?”

“Yes,” she said, though I believed she worried my skepticism might hinder the process more than help it.

“I thought you wanted me to just observe.”

“I did, but for this, you can’t just observe. If you are present, you must partake. A thought-form requires everyone in the room to concentrate intensely on the subject matter. I need you to believe in this, Detective. You must concentrate very hard and visualize with the rest of us, or it won’t work.”

I wanted to laugh, and almost did, but quickly realized Lilith was serious. I wiped the smile from my face and sat up straight in my chair. “Okay. Tell me what I’m supposed to concentrate on. I mean, what’s a thought-form look like?”

“A thought-form is a nonphysical entity created from thought,” she explained. “This energy gives off vibrations, and with our collective minds focusing our energies at the same time, we may give these vibrations definition, and even character. We can create a sort of artificial element. Once this element has taken form, it can take on energy of its own and even assume intelligence. All I want you to do is concentrate very hard on Travis Webber. Do not let your mind become

distracted, no matter what you see, hear or feel. Once the thought-form appears, you must allow it to take its course. It won't hurt you, it won't cause any trouble, and it probably won't break anything."

"Probably?" I said, though my comment went without reply.

Lilith shut the lights out again, opened the blinds to the night sky and then took a seat at the head of the table.

"Let's get started. I want everyone to assume a comfortable position. I recommend sitting up straight with hands folded in front of you and heads forward."

She paused to allow a few to squirm in their seats before settling comfortably into position.

"Okay, now everyone take a couple of deep breaths and relax. You must expel the tension from your bodies before this can work. Your minds must remain focused. If you have an itch, scratch it now; otherwise close your eyes and think only of Travis Webber. I must have your full and complete concentration. I want you to visualize his face and his body. Think about his smile and even the spelling of his name. Whatever vision of Travis stands out the strongest for you, then that is the thought I want you to stay with. Collectively, we can bring him back in thought-form, but you all must concentrate."

Lilith surveyed the room to make sure everyone complied with her instructions. To solidify the group's mindset, she closed her eyes and concentrated on Travis as well. She told us that she could feel the residual energy of Travis's aura still in the room, even though two months had passed since he took his last breath there.

"His presence is strong and undeniable," she said, and the others concurred in murmurs.

Within minutes, the room grew noticeably colder, and not just because one of the windows had blown out. The chill first settled along the floor at ankle height. From there it radiated upward. At mid-waist, it raised goose bumps on exposed skin, and above that it blew out in vaporous trails upon exhale.

Lilith started humming a low, almost inaudible tone, like a monk in meditation. It started at the top of a deep breath and continued as she let her breath out slowly and with barely an effort of vocal cord movement. Before long, the entire group followed her example and soon the room filled with an almost electrifying low-level chant.

*"Ohmmm—Ohmmm."*

The harmonics blended like a symphony, creating a collective wall of sound that vibrated and reverberated around the room in waves. In time, it actually seemed as if the chorus, once uttered,

continued to carry along on its own, even as we all vocalized another verse. Soon the choir of just ten people grew to that of many, as layers upon layers of sound resonated repeatedly in predictable patterns. Eventually, we all stopped humming, but the wall of sound continued unhindered. It swirled like a whirlpool clockwise around the room. No longer merely an echo or reverberation, but now it had become pure energy in sound form, growing and feeding off itself.

I opened my eyes and panned the room in disbelief. I felt afraid but intrigued, remembering Lilith's words that the thought-form would not hurt us. I blinked when a sudden blast of wind whistled past my side of the table. The other participants opened their eyes as if on cue, no longer bound by concentration to the task.

"The thought-form is here," Lilith told us, her voice rising above the noise that now filled the room in harmonic waves. She turned toward a window; we followed her lead. I noticed immediately the intense vibration in the glass. It rattled fiercely within its pane, yet the other windows remained unaffected by the phenomenon.

By then, the wall of sound seemed to shift entirely to the other side of the room. I could not be sure, but at that moment, I believed the noise now originated *from* the window! I sat twitching with unease, anxious beyond words, watching in amazement at the spectacle before me. I looked at Lilith, but she and the others sat quietly with hands folded, as if waiting for something else to happen—waiting for *it* to happen.

Some moments later, I came to realize that the sound was not coming from the window at all, but rather rushing to it on a current of high-energy plasma, of sorts. The window absorbed the sound like a sonic sponge, sucking and feeding desperately its ever-hungry need for energy. Moreover, as the wall of sound grew weaker, the window shook with greater and greater intensity. It journeyed beyond my comprehension why the window did not break with such apparent force working against it. Then, what I had witnessed so far remained equally beyond anything I had imagined before. Yet all that was about to become incidental still, as if not already a believer, I was about to become one.

Without warning, the noise abruptly ceased, and just as suddenly, the window quit rattling. Then a fog or a thin mist appeared on the glass like steam on a bathroom mirror. I concluded it could be neither steam nor fog, however, as the other windows remained transparent. I watched as the mist took shape upon the glass, or more accurately, took on form.

At first, it appeared undistinguishable, a curious but random sculpting of evaporating moisture changing from one clouded abstract shape to another. Eventually, a recognizable form did appear,

and soon it became obvious; the thought-form that materialized was indeed Travis Webber. The stunning revelation quickened my heartbeat and shortened my breath, as well as those of nearly everyone in the room. It provided a splendid, yet frightening glimpse of unnatural wonder—a perfectly unbelievable event unfolding before our very eyes.

For some, like Millie and me, the sight seemed nothing short of a miracle. We had never heard of something called a thought-form before, let alone seen one. We watched in awe, as the form appeared to move across the window like an actor in a silent movie walking across the screen. No sound accompanied the vision, but the color and texture produced a life-like 3-D image so real that one could almost reach out and touch Travis and he would know it—he would *feel* it.

All doubts I had harbored about the paranormal were quickly fading. The phenomenon before me I could not explain—least not with an understanding that anyone would accept—but it could be described, as I later did with my colleagues back at the precinct. “Very simply,” I told them (lest those who would listen) “we were watching a movie, a movie of things that had already come to pass.”

In the movie, we saw Travis on the night of his murder, leaving the research center alone. We watched him step out the front door and put his hands in his pockets to keep them warm. His breath blew visible in the form of steam and dissipated in the chilly night air.

For his fellow shop mates, it seemed an unusual perspective, glimpsing Travis through the eyes of another, presumably the killer’s, lurking in the shadows of the compound. Knowing that the murderer was still out there left many in the group feeling uncomfortable, especially me, as I believed more than anyone that the killer could likely be someone very near; perhaps someone sitting beside me, watching again what happened to poor Travis. I looked toward the door and took note of those sitting closest to it. I imagined that if someone tried to run, I could catch up to him quickly, though I did not expect that to happen. Running now would be the worst thing any of them could do, guilty or not.

An impish breeze frolicked in mischievous little circles about the room, frisking the hairs on one’s neck, as the scene played out before our eyes. In the backdrop of the movie, we saw the full moon shadowed by the real full moon outside the very window we watched. We saw how Travis stopped in his tracks on the way to his car. He turned and backtracked to the front door. From there, we saw the killer’s view, coming up on Travis, standing directly behind him, watching him pound in vain on the locked door. We watched Travis cup his hands to the glass to shield the glare and peer inside.

Until then, we could only imagine what happened next, knowing the extent of Travis' wound. Still, imagination could hardly prepare anyone for the horror unfolding so vividly. For some, the visualization of the murder proved more than they could bear. Several shielded their eyes and panted with anticipation of the inevitable. Those who did not see Travis turn, his face assaulted by leather-clad hands. The force drove his head back against the door; the plate-glass shattered upon impact. He drew his arms up to his face, leaving his midriff vulnerable. His attacker looked down at the knife pressed against Travis' stomach and pushed it in.

More gasps of indignation bled from the group, as they watch Travis fall to his knees. They stared in dismay as he clutched his gaping wound, looked up at his killer and mouthed the words, "It's you!"

Drained of color and numbed by cold, he closed his eyes, lurched forward and collapsed onto the steps face down. The thought-form then faded, as the fog on the window lifted, leaving only a full moon hanging in the branches of the gray oaks outside.