

Tania Casts

A Spell



By Kanika G

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Edited by Pell G

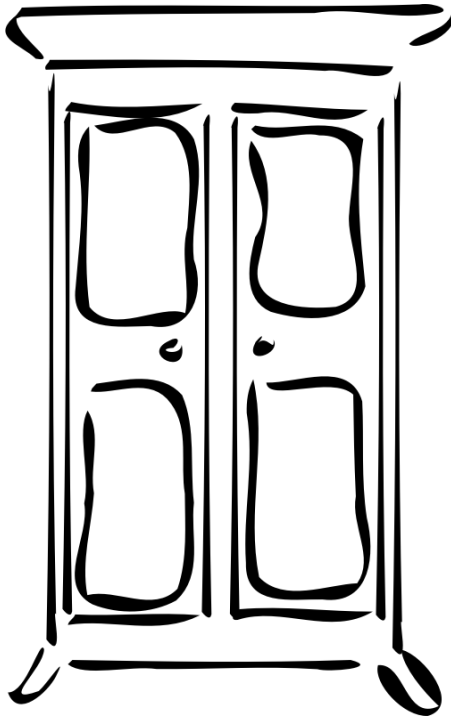
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Tania Casts A Spell

One Saturday morning, Tania was helping Mama clear out a neglected storage cupboard. It had accumulated years of junk and some treasures.



There were some pictures of Mama from when she was little. There were also about a dozen books that Mama loved when she was Tania's age. Tania

helped Mama pack the old clothes, shoes and knickknacks neatly into boxes, so they could be sent to various charities. But she kept the books and photographs for herself.



That afternoon, Tania took the books to her reading club; *The Bookworm Babies*. She selected one to read, and put the rest on the the club bookshelves.

The book she chose, had a short story about a spell a little girl had used to bring bad luck to a boy who teased her a lot. The spell was described in rhyme. Tania thought it was really amusing. She showed it to Tanisha. Both girls giggled as they read:

Start with a pint of boiling water
Add 2 tea spoons of mud from the gutter

Insert a piece of mouldy bread
And some hair from your victims head

Crayon wax is needed too
And shavings from a pencil blue

Use 6 long strands of real cat hair
Add some fur from your teddy bear

A smelly sock and some toe nail clippings
A dash of ear wax and dry bird droppings

Mix the stuff, stir clockwise 4 times and say
"May rotten luck befall my victim for a weekend and
a day"

"Outrageous!" said Tanisha.

"We should try it out." Tania winked.

"Good idea! Whose hair should we use?" asked Tanisha.

"How about Abhijeet's hair? He is always teasing us. It would be fun to cast a bad luck spell on him."

"You don't really believe this stuff, do you?" Tanisha frowned.

"Of course, not!" snorted Tania. But it would be fun to pretend to cast it on someone we don't like."

"True." Tanisha nodded.

"So it is settled. Abhijeet is going to be our victim." Tania declared with an evil grin.

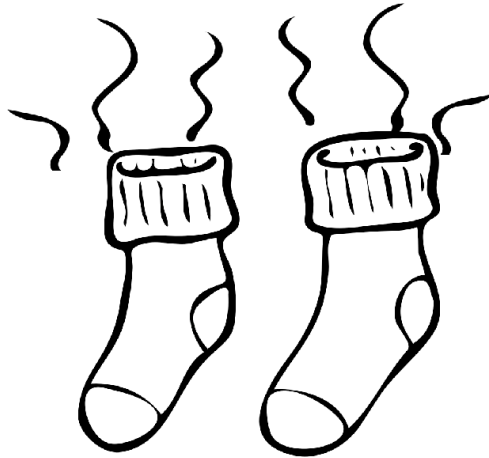


Tanisha smiled. "Let us do it on Friday, after school. It will take some time to get his hair, moldy bread and smelly socks. Also since the spell is supposed to work for a weekend and a day, Friday is the perfect day to cast it."

Tania nodded in agreement.

Over the next few days, the girls gathered the ingredients for the spell. Tania managed to wear the same pair of socks to school for three days in a row. She would quietly

switch the dirty pair with a clean one, just before Mama started the washing machine. Sneaky!



The girls collected dry pigeon droppings from a car parked under a tree.

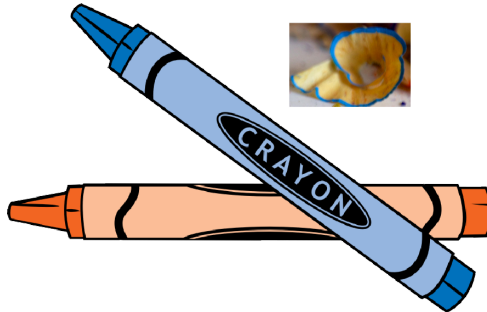
There were a couple of places, where the cover of the gutter in their housing society was damaged, and had holes large enough for the girls to get their hands in. So getting two tea spoons of gutter mud was fairly easy.



Tanisha put a piece of bread in a plastic bag and hid it behind some books in her book shelf. By Friday, it was as moldy as it could be.



Tania delved into her art supplies box for the crayon wax and blue pencil shavings.



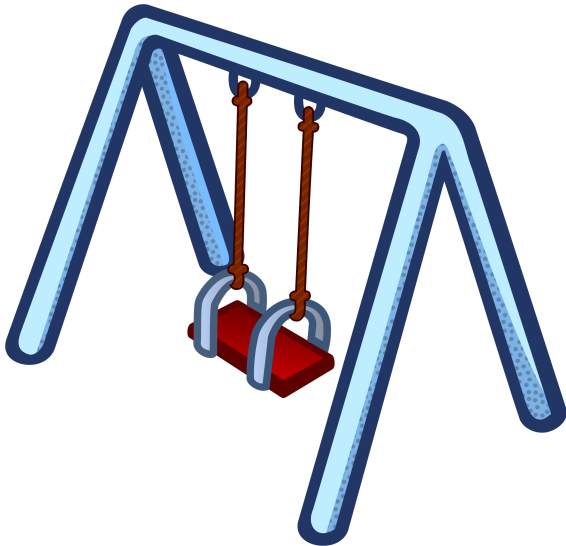
Kazoo, Tania's pet cat, willingly provided the necessary cat hair when Tania pet her for a few minutes. In fact, she came away with a lot more cat hair than the spell needed.



Getting Abhijeet's hair on the other hand, required some ingenuity. Tania

and Tanisha talked about it and came up with a plan.

On Wednesday evening, the girls spotted Abhijeet on the swing by himself. Tanisha boldly walked up to him. "Hey big guy, I bet I could pull out your hair faster than you could pull mine out."



Abhijeet snorted, "Yeah right! Like I am going to let a pip squeak like you pull my hair."

Tania sniggered, "Clearly the poor guy doesn't think he can win the

bet."

"What did you say you pint sized little sissy?" bellowed Abhijeet.

Tania was starting to feel frightened, but she held her ground. She said, as coolly as she could manage, "It sounds to me like you don't think you can win the bet."

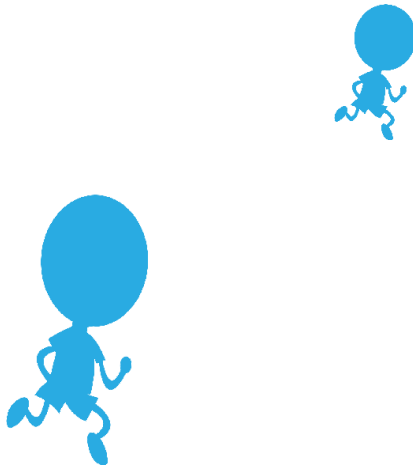
"All right pip squeak! Lets do this." Abhijeet snarled.



"On the count of three," Tania nodded. **"One, two, three! Go Tanisha, quick, quick, quick."**

Tanisha had already studied the situation. Abhijeet had very short hair. So Tanisha had decided her best bet was to try and get some from the front, where it was longest. On the count of three, she acted like lightning and pulled a few strands his front hair. Abhijeet, still angry with he girls, took a few seconds to react.

Before he knew it, Tanisha had run away with some of his hair. Tania knew better than to stay within reach of the angry, goaded boy stomping around in rage. So, she too, had sprinted away.



The girls met at a safe, previously agreed upon, rendezvous point. By the time Abhijeet had his bearings, the girls were nowhere in sight.

Tanisha was worried about what Abhijeet would do the next time he saw her. Luckily for Tanisha, the incident had been too humiliating for Abhijeet. No one other than Tania and Tanisha knew about it, and Abhijeet was eager to keep it that way. So the next time he saw Tania and Tanisha, he pretended nothing had happened.



On Friday afternoon after school, Tania went to Tanisha's house. She carried all the ingredients for the spell, including her toe nail

clippings and a chunk of fur from her least favorite teddy bear.

The mothers of both girls had gone out together to watch a movie. So Trisha was in charge. She was amused when she found out what the girls were upto and agreed to help them out.

Trisha put a pot of water to boil. When she saw the list of ingredients she exclaimed "Yuck! How awful. Are you sure this guy is worth it?"



Tania said, "We don't believe in the spell. It is just fun to do."

"Okay, whatever," said Trisha, losing interest. "I am reading in my room. Don't burn the house down."

Left to themselves, Tania and Tanisha carefully followed all the instructions for the spell. The girls even managed to get a bit of ear wax by sticking their fingers in their ears.



At last when all the ingredients were added, Tania used a large wooden spoon to stir the mixture four times in the clockwise direction, and the girls chanted loudly in unison:

**"May rotten luck befall my
victim for a weekend and a
day."**

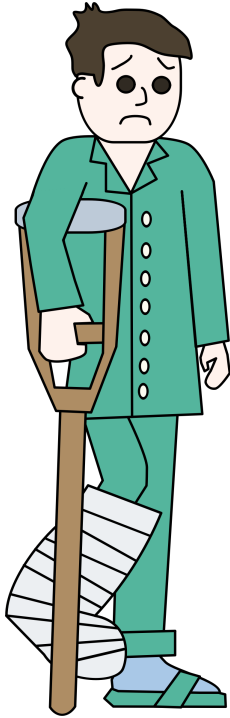
With the spell complete, Tania and Tanisha washed out the pot and spent the rest of the afternoon playing board games. They forgot all about the spell ... until ...

On Monday morning, Tania and Tanisha were waiting for the school bus. Abhijeet arrived. He was a couple of years older than Tania, and went to a high school. Tania would probably go there next year, when she was done with pre-school. The buses for both schools came to the housing society around the same time.

Abhijeet was carrying a beautiful model brick house made of cardboard. For all his faults, he was very talented at craft.



But it was not model house, that caught Tania's eye. Poor Abhijeet seemed to have broken his leg over the weekend. His leg was in a cast, and he was using a crutch. He was in his pajamas, waiting for something.



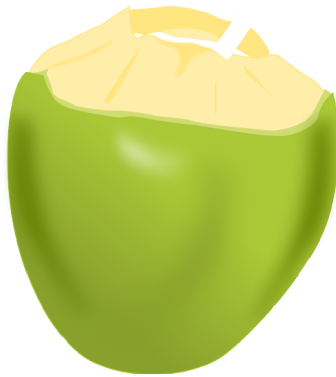
Tania looked meaningfully at Tanisha. Tanisha said, "I hope our spell did not do that. It is a bit harsh, even for a bully like him."

Tania said, "Come on. You don't really believe in spells, do you? It's just a co-incidence." But she sounded doubtful.

Just then, Mahesh arrived. He was Abhijeet's class mate. Abhijeet asked Mahesh to give his craft project to

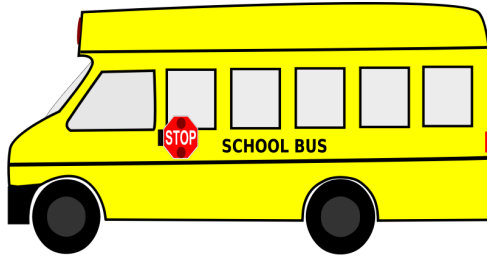
the teacher. He said, "I hate the idea of turning my craft assignment in late."

Abhijeet was handing the model house over to Mahesh, when a coconut from the tree above fell on it and smashed it.



Abhijeet was speechless, and his face froze in an expression of horror. Mahesh picked up the now ruined card house, and Abhijeet took it and went home with out a word.

Tania and Tanisha looked at each other in dismay as they entered the bus. They were feeling very guilty.



How much more bad luck would Abhijeet have to put up with before the day ended and the spell was neutralized? The spell did say that the bad luck would last for a weekend and a day, and now both Tania and Tanisha were convinced that the spell was working.

Tania did not enjoy her classes at all and felt distracted and guilty all day. When she got home, she was bursting with guilt and confessed everything about the spell to Mama.

She added, "Mama, I am so sorry. Tanisha and I never thought the spell could work. Will Abhijeet lose the craft prize, he usually wins? Will he miss the inter-class cricket finals because of his leg?"

Mama smiled. She said "Tania you did not do anything wrong. Spells don't work, Honey. You know that. You did it, to vent your anger at Abhijeet, in a harmless way."



"But Mama, it did work. Abhijeet broke his leg, and the coconut fell on the craft project he had worked so hard on. I don't know what other bad luck he has had because of us." Tania could not hold back her tears. "I really did not mean for any of this to happen. It was just a joke. You always told me that these things are not real."

Mama tried to calm Tania down with a hug. She said, "Tania, I met Abhijeet's mother this morning. She

said Abhijeet broke his leg while playing soccer. But when they took him to the hospital, his favorite cricketer was there getting treated for a sprain, and he signed Abhijeet's cast. Abhijeet was thrilled. His mother also said it was such great luck that the coconut fell on his craft project, and not on his head. So they both think he has had some great luck these last few days."

"Oh, and the doctor says Abhijeet will completely recover about ten days before the inter-class cricket finals and can play in it." Mama added.



"They think he has had *good luck!*"
Tania goggled at Mama.

"Yes, Honey. Don't you think the same, now that you know more?"

"Yes, I suppose he has. So the spell did not work, did it?"

"No, it did not. More importantly, there is no reason to believe a spell could work." Mama pointed out.

Tania was about to leave when Mama pulled her back. She realized this was an excellent opportunity to explain an interesting phenomenon. "Tania, this is how people start believing in superstitions." She began. "If there is a small part of you that wants to believe in a superstition, then you will only notice those facts that support the superstition, and disregard the ones that don't support it or even outright disprove it. Often, this is not a conscious process. None of us are immune from this tendency. Scientists call it a confirmation bias."

"So how do I avoid this trap in future?"

"It is hard to completely avoid. But there are some things you can try. When drawing conclusions about something, try to get as much information as you can, and then try to view all the information from many different perspectives."

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