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**The Witch-Bottle**

I remember a very remarkable story, told to me by Mr Brearly, once a fellow[[1]](#footnote-1) of Christ’s College in Cambridge, who lodged[[2]](#footnote-2) in a house in Suffolk, where his landlady[[3]](#footnote-3) had been harmed by ­­­witchcraft.

An old travelling man knew the landlady of a house and called in there one day to visit her and ask if she was well. Her husband answered the door and told him that she wasn’t well at all. She was haunted by a thing in the shape of a bird that flew near her face so that she couldn’t sleep. “Don’t worry” said the old man “it’s just a troublesome sprite[[4]](#footnote-4). I know just how to get rid of it”. He advised him to take a bottle and put his wife’s urine into it, together with pins, needles and nails and then to push a cork firmly into the bottle’s neck. He told him to put the bottle onto the fire, making sure that the cork was stuck in tightly so that it couldn’t fly out. The man did as he was told, filled the bottle, pushed in a cork and put it onto the fire. After it had heated up for a while, the cork began to jiggle. The man took the fire shovel[[5]](#footnote-5), and held it onto the cork to keep it in. All of a sudden, the cork bounced out, and the urine, pins, nails and needles all flew out too, making a sound like a pistol! His wife was just as ill as before.

Not long afterwards, the old man came to the house again, and asked how the landlady was. Once more, her husband answered the door. “She is as ill as ever, if not worse”, he said. The old man asked him if he had followed his directions exactly. “Yes”, said he, and told him everything that happened. “Ha!” said the old travelling man, “It seems the sprite was too clever for you, but now I will tell you what to do. Take your wife's urine as before, and cork it in the bottle again with nails, pins and needles but this time bury it in the earth. That will do it!” The Man did as he was told and, sure enough, his wife began to get better.

Very soon, a woman from a town some miles away from their house came to see them. “You have killed my husband!” she cried. “What on earth do you mean?” they asked, thinking she must be mad because they had never met either her or her husband. “Yes,” said the woman, “you have killed my husband! He told me so on his death-bed!”

At last they understood. Her husband must have been the wizard who bewitched[[6]](#footnote-6) the landlady! The witch bottle had cured the landlady and killed the wizard who had cast the spell.

Mr. Brearly heard this story directly from the mouth of the landlady and her husband when he lodged in their house, so there is no doubt it is true.

Adapted from

*Saducismus Triumphatus, or, Full and plain evidence concerning witches and apparitions in two parts : the first treating of their possibility, the second of their real existence*, by Joseph Glanville, London : Printed for J. Collins and S. Lownds, 1681, p206 (*Accessed via Early English Books Online)*

**This source is a story that was published in a book about witches in 1681.**

**Task 1: Read the story and answer the questions below.**

1. Why was the landlady unwell?
2. What did the old travelling man believe was making her ill?
3. What did the old man tell her husband to do?
4. Why didn’t this remedy work?
5. What did the old man suggest they should do next?
6. What had happened to the visiting woman’s husband?
7. Why had this happened?
8. Do you think everyone who read this in 1681 believed in witches and wizards? What makes you say that?

**Task 2: Write instructions for making a witch-bottle.**

Use these sentence starters to help you.

This is a very effective cure for ….

First ………

Next………..

Then……......

Finally…………

1. **A respected university scholar** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Paid someone to rent a room in their house** [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **A woman who owns a house and rents out rooms**  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **A fairy (fairies in seventeenth-century stories are always evil!)** [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **A spade for putting coal on the fire** [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **Used witchcraft to cast spells on someone** [↑](#footnote-ref-6)