

The Weather, the Witch, and the Wedding

Cami Danaher spent close to \$100,000 on her February wedding in Chicago, but the purchase she keeps coming back to only cost \$14. A few weeks before the date, with the venue booked, the dress fitted, and every controllable thing under control, she opened Etsy and paid a stranger who calls herself a witch to keep the snow away. The weather turned out mild, though Danaher does not really believe the spell had anything to do with it. She paid for it regardless, and so did plenty of other couples hoping to protect a day they had spent so much to plan.

The witch she hired belongs to a world that has become strikingly visible. Practices once considered fringe now circulate openly online, where a corner of TikTok called WitchTok walks audiences of millions through spells, moon rituals, and tarot readings. A word that spent centuries as an accusation has become a lifestyle and a business.

There is a genuine strangeness in all of this. For much of American history, witchcraft sat somewhere between sin, fraud, and social threat, and now versions of it surface on social feeds, online storefronts, and recommendation algorithms. The platforms were never quite comfortable with promises of guaranteed outcomes. In the 2010s, eBay and then Etsy swept spells off their sites on the sensible logic that no shop can guarantee a result it cannot deliver, and the line they drew is the interesting part: they did not ban metaphysical objects, only promised outcomes. A crystal was fine, while a crystal that promised true love was not. Sellers soon learned the workaround. If they attached a physical candle to each listing and stamped the page "for entertainment purposes only," the spells could keep selling while the companies kept their cut. In recent years, Etsy has stepped up enforcement in earnest, leading to cries of a modern witch hunt. It is a heavy phrase for what is, in the end, a dispute over online listings.

The trade runs across a startling price range. At the cheap end of the spectrum are the wedding sellers, whose perfect-weather spells start around \$3 and arrive as a PDF, while at the other end sit the professional fortune tellers of the wellness world, one of whom charges roughly £1,500 for a single session. And the spells are not only for weddings. During last year's playoffs, baseball fans bought good-luck spells from an Etsy witch, and people order them for new jobs, financial luck, or an ex they want back.

Here is the part that complicates every easy conclusion. Many of the buyers claim they do not believe it, and they say so freely. Whether belief is really the point is another question. Even some professional fortune tellers are skeptical of weather spells, dismissing them as hocus pocus that would take godlike power and telling nervous couples to buy a canopy instead. So the story is not really about people falling for magic, but about people knowingly paying for a feeling.

To see why the wedding became such fertile ground for this, you only have to look at the bill. The average American wedding now runs around \$34,000, and in the expensive cities it climbs far higher, reaching \$75,000 in New York. The day has also become a performance, complete with an "Instagram tax" like the \$1,500 one bride paid for a vinyl dance floor that guests

crossed exactly once. And America is hardly unique in this. Korea's wedding costs have risen just as steeply, with the national average now past 21 million won and the figure in the Gangnam districts of Seoul approaching 50 million won once the assumed extras are added in. Part of the rise is a change in taste. Where couples once booked the traditional wedding hall, which runs several ceremonies at once and feeds guests from a shared buffet, more now want a hotel wedding, where meals are served privately and the venue can host far fewer events, so the price climbs accordingly.

Once a single afternoon costs so much and carries so much expectation, its one uncontrollable element becomes unbearable. A storm stops feeling like weather and turns into a threat to months of planning and money. The spell promises to take that one fear off the table.

There is real psychology beneath that impulse. When an outcome is genuinely out of your hands, a symbolic action that lets you feel involved rather than helpless can lower stress on its own, whether or not it changes anything. Interpreted this way, the weather spell is not magic at all but a kind of emotional insurance, one that works on the buyer rather than the sky.

Something broader sits underneath all of this. Wellness culture and a build-your-own spirituality have made practices that were once odd feel ordinary, and it is tempting to say the magic is simply filling the space left as organized religion thins out. That may be part of it, but the people selling and buying tend to name other causes: the isolation of the pandemic, the pull of social media, or a deliberate reclaiming of a word once used to persecute women. Which of these is doing the real work is an open question, and one better argued than settled.

One detail closes the loop better than any argument. A bride in London received her spell as a written document, and at the very bottom, in case the sky refused to cooperate, sat a single line of insurance: "Rain itself is a blessing." As a product it is nearly flawless, because nothing can ever prove it failed. A sunny day means the spell worked, and a rainy one means the rain was always meant to fall. Either way the buyer walks off with the one thing no budget line could otherwise hand her, which is permission to stop worrying about the part that was never hers to decide. Not a believer, exactly. Just nervous, and \$15 lighter, and calmer for it.

- 1) Do you do anything superstitious before something important, like an exam or a flight?
- 2) When you feel anxious about something you cannot control, what do you usually do to calm yourself down?
- 3) How do you feel about spending money on things that bring peace of mind rather than something you can actually use?
- 4) Have you ever worried about the weather for an important event, like a wedding, a trip, or an outdoor plan?
- 5) Do you think websites and online marketplaces should be allowed to sell things like spells, lucky charms, or fortunes?
- 6) Why do you think weddings keep getting more expensive?
- 7) Do you think people now plan events more for how they will look to others than for the people who are actually there?

- 8) Are there any traditions or rituals in Korea that people still follow for luck or good fortune around big life events?
- 9) As the world feels more uncertain, do you think old beliefs like magic and superstition will grow stronger or fade away?

Come back to (sth)	(phr v)	to return to a thought, topic, or idea again because it stays in your mind	She kept coming back to the same question all evening, unable to let it go.
Fitted	(adj)	made or adjusted to be exactly the right size or shape for someone	The tailor handed back the jacket, now perfectly fitted across the shoulders.
Turn out	(phr v)	to happen or end in a particular way, often one you did not expect	We were worried about the trip, but it turned out far better than anyone had hoped.
Strikingly	(adv)	in a way that is noticeable or unusual enough to attract attention	The two reports reached strikingly different conclusions from the very same data.
Fringe	(n)	the outer edge of a group or activity, away from what is considered normal or mainstream	For years the idea sat on the fringe of medicine before doctors took it seriously.
Circulate	(v)	to move around freely or spread among many people or places	Rumors about the merger circulated through the office long before any announcement.
Accusation	(n)	a statement that someone has done something wrong or illegal	He denied the accusation calmly, but the damage to his reputation was already done.
Surface	(v)	to appear or become known after being hidden or unnoticed for a time	Old complaints about the building's safety surfaced again after the recent inspection.
Draw the line	(idm)	to set a limit on what you are willing to accept or do	I do not mind staying late occasionally, but I draw the line at working weekends.
Metaphysical	(adj)	relating to things beyond the physical world that cannot be seen or proven by science	The lecture drifted from practical advice into metaphysical questions about the soul.
Workaround	(n)	a way of dealing with a problem or limitation without solving it directly	The software still has the bug, but the team found a simple workaround for now.
Step up	(phr v)	to increase the amount, level, or intensity of an effort or activity	The city stepped up security around the stadium ahead of the championship match.

Earnest	(n)	used in the phrase 'in earnest' to mean seriously and with real effort	After months of casual talks, negotiations finally began in earnest last week.
Cry	(n)	a public expression of strong protest or demand, usually used in the plural	The decision was reversed within days, after cries of unfairness from across the country.
Startling	(adj)	so surprising or unexpected that it shocks you slightly	The survey revealed a startling gap between what people say and what they actually do.
Hocus pocus	(exp)	meaningless talk or activity meant to trick or distract people	He dismissed the whole presentation as hocus pocus designed to hide weak results.
Canopy	(n)	a cover, usually of cloth, hung or held above something for shelter or shade	They set up a white canopy over the garden tables in case the afternoon turned wet.
Fall for (sth)	(phr v)	to be tricked into believing something that is not true	The email looked official, and thousands of people fell for the scam within hours.
Fertile ground	(idm)	a situation or place where something can easily develop or grow	A struggling economy can be fertile ground for promises no politician can keep.
Off the table	(idm)	no longer available or no longer being considered as an option	Once the budget was cut, the overseas expansion was firmly off the table.
Impulse	(n)	a sudden strong wish or urge to do something without thinking it through	She bought the painting on impulse and regretted the price the very next morning.
Interpret	(v)	to understand or explain the meaning of something in a particular way	Two readers can interpret the same poem in completely opposite ways.
Thin out	(phr v)	to gradually become fewer, less dense, or less concentrated	The crowd began to thin out once the rain grew heavier toward evening.
Persecute	(v)	to treat someone cruelly or unfairly over a long period, often for their beliefs or identity	The community had been persecuted for generations before finally being allowed to worship openly.
Flawless	(adj)	without any faults, mistakes, or weaknesses	Her performance was nearly flawless, and even the strict judges could find little to criticize.