

Beware Of What You Ask For

by

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Beware Of What You Ask For

DESCRIPTION

Beware Of What You Ask For is based on the South American folk tale The Rooster's Claw. It is a story about the unintended consequences of desire. Raúl and Sofía were very much in love. They had two children and worked very hard, and life rewarded them well. One day, Raúl disappeared on the way home from market, and Sofía never found out what happened to him. Her sadness turned to bitterness and she began to complain about everything in life. Realizing that she was alone and turning mean, she consulted the curandera, the healer, to find help. The curandera gave her the rooster's claw, which could grant wishes, but warned her that it was a little dangerous and not very reliable. Sofía didn't care: how much worse could her life get? The rest of the tale reveals her three wishes and their ironic consequences. She returned the rooster's claw to the curandera and stopped complaining because she knew that life could be strange than it was.

CHARACTERS

- **Raúl**, young man -- *walks with a limp*
- **Sofía**, his wife
- **Narrator**, can be male or female; "he" is used for convenience
- **Curandera**, the healer

SETTING

- In the country, but indeterminate

TIME

- Fluid

PROPERTIES

- Four flashlights
- Rooster's claw
- A length of rope: should be longer than the diameter of the hoop and should glow in the dark
- A hoop of some sort -- should be made out of a rigid material with a wide diameter and should glow in the dark; it can be covered up with a tube of black cloth that can be slid open and closed.
- Two white half-masks for CURANDERA and RAÚL
- Scarf

MISCELLANEOUS

Sound effects and music would be nice, especially if provided live. However, if they cannot be provided, the play can still be produced. If used, the director can decide what kind of music and sound should be used, and where.

Note #1: Ethnicity/race does not matter for actors. Age matters for RAÚL and SOFÍA because they're supposed to be young but not for the other two roles.

Beware Of What You Ask For

If possible, pre-show music: lively dance tunes. As the lights go out, the music changes: spooky, ominous, but not heavy. If music cannot be used, something from the actors to create a spooky feeling.

CURANDERA comes to downstage center with a flashlight and kneels facing upstage; NARRATOR stands center stage. CURANDERA turns the flashlight on NARRATOR. RAÚL and SOFÍA also come out with flashlights. Wherever NARRATOR moves, a flashlight follows him. The movement should be worked out so that when NARRATOR moves to a different part of the stage, one flashlight switches off as another switches on.

NARRATOR

Have you ever wished for something really hard, something that you thought you just couldn't live without? If you have ever done that, say "I wish."

(wait for audience response)

And when you got your wish, did it ever turn out to be very different from what you thought would happen? If that ever happened to you, say "No more!"

(wait for response)

Sofía made a wish on the rooster's claw, and it brought her something she did not expect. It is always good to be careful what you wish for.

Flashlights out. NARRATOR turns his own flashlight on his own face. RAÚL and SOFÍA are on the opposite side of the stage from him. As NARRATOR speaks, they act out what he says. CURANDERA's flashlight can be used as well for lighting, and NARRATOR does not always need to keep his light on himself. The suggested uses of the flashlights are only suggested; directors and actors are free to change them.

NARRATOR

Raúl and Sofía were very much in love.

(moony faces in the lights)

Raúl worked very hard in the fields, digging and weeding, cutting wood and hauling water, even though he walked with a limp.

(all lights on RAÚL as he works)

And Sofía worked very hard, too, to keep up the house, sew their clothes, and cook their meals.

(all lights on SOFÍA as she works)

They had a son --

(one cradles the flashlight like a baby)

-- and a daughter --

(the other cradles the flashlight like a baby)
-- which only added to their happiness. Then,
one day, Raúl went to market, as he usually did.
And he did not return.

All lights on SOFÍA as she runs around looking for RAÚL.

SOFÍA

Raúl, where are you? Why didn't you return from
the market today? The children are crying, the
dinner got cold, and it feels as if the whole
world is waiting for you to get home. I am so
very, very scared.

SOFÍA sits but continues to trace her flashlight along the ground.
NARRATOR lights his own face.

NARRATOR

He could not be found anywhere. Heartbroken, she
looked for him every day, but over time her
sadness turned to bitterness.

Holding her flashlight over her head, so that it shines down on her.

SOFÍA

Why did you leave us? Now I have to do all the
work. And it is isn't easy raising our children
alone. I'll bet you're off having a happy time
somewhere.

SOFÍA continues to mouth complaints as NARRATOR speaks.

NARRATOR

She stayed home more and more, going out to look
for him only once a month, then only on the
anniversary of his disappearance. She began to
complain and complain, and no one could stand to
be near her. If someone said --

RAÚL

(wearing a hat and a moustache)
Isn't the sun beautiful today?

NARRATOR

She would say --

SOFÍA

No, it's not -- we need the rain!

NARRATOR

If someone said --

CURANDERA

(wearing a veil or some headdress)

Isn't it wonderful that we got the rain for our crops?

NARRATOR

She would say --

SOFÍA

What they really need is sun! This rain is terrible!

As NARRATOR speaks, SOFÍA interrupts with her complaints, but these gradually wind down as NARRATOR talks about her loneliness.

NARRATOR

And she wouldn't stop! If the bread was fresh, she thought it was stale.

SOFÍA

It tastes like dust!

NARRATOR

If a baby was born --

SOFÍA

Welcome to this evil world!

NARRATOR

She's talked about the widow who died the day before.

SOFÍA

It's always the women who suffer!

NARRATOR

Until one day she noticed -- she looked around herself and noticed -- that she was all alone.

SOFÍA

I am alone.

NARRATOR

Her children left her for the city as soon as they were old enough to go. Her neighbors couldn't stand her vinegar face and acid mouth and never visited her. She was completely and utterly alone.

SOFÍA

I am all alone. This is not good -- it is not good to be so alone. I have to do something about this.

NARRATOR

She decided to go see the curandera, the one who cured, the healer in the village, to see what advice this wise woman would give.

SOFÍA

I have to bring something to her, as an offering
--

CURANDERA's voice comes out of the darkness.

CURANDERA

Yes, you do.

SOFÍA

What can I bring? I have no money, I have no jewelry.

CURANDERA

It can be anything.

SOFÍA

I only have this scarf.

CURANDERA

Good.

SOFÍA

Well, if that's all I have, then that's all I have, and she'll just have to like it!

NARRATOR

Your voice, Sofia -- the tone.

SOFÍA

Yes, you're right.

(takes a deep breath)

It will be a good gift.

The flashlights play around the space as the actors move while NARRATOR speaks. They will stop with RAÚL and NARRATOR behind CURANDERA, who is wearing the half-mask. RAÚL and NARRATOR will shine their lights down on CURANDERA; CURANDERA will leave her light off. SOFÍA shines her own light on her own face.

NARRATOR
So she went to the curandera, clutching her scarf
--

SOFÍA
It's all I have.

NARRATOR
Mumbling to herself --

SOFÍA
It's all I have --

NARRATOR
Thinking of all the stories --

SOFÍA
I hope it's enough --

NARRATOR
-- people had told her about the mysterious ways
of the curandera --

SOFÍA
Oh, please help me! Please, please!

NARRATOR
-- and hoping that she had some cure that would
end her terrifying loneliness.

The actors are in place. Through the next lines, the actors and director should feel free to create whatever spooky effects they want with the flashlights.

CURANDERA
Who walks there?

SOFÍA is speechless for the moment.

CURANDERA
Who comes here?

SOFÍA
(in a creaky voice)
Me.

CURANDERA
Who is me?!

SOFÍA
Sofía.

CURANDERA

Ah, Sofía. I know you. Sofía of the sour mouth.

SOFÍA

Life is hard --

CURANDERA

I know about you. The lonely woman. The one nobody likes because you complain too much.

SOFÍA

Life is very hard --

CURANDERA

And why have you come to me?

SOFÍA

I want --

CURANDERA

I know what you want! Why should I help you?

SOFÍA

They say you have magical powers --

CURANDERA

And that's why I should help you?!

SOFÍA

I am so very lonely. Yes, it's my fault, but I don't want it anymore.

CURANDERA

Sometimes you have to live with things --

SOFÍA

My husband disappeared so many years ago, my children have left me. I have no one. Help me.

CURANDERA

What have you brought me?

SOFÍA holds out the scarf.

SOFÍA

This is the best that I own.

SOFÍA hands it to CURANDERA.

CURANDERA

This?

SOFÍA

It's all I have.

CURANDERA

This isn't much.

(looking up at RAÚL and NARRATOR)

What do you think?

Their lights nod "yes."

CURANDERA

All right, I'll take it. But you don't get much for it.

CURANDERA pulls out the rooster's claw and shines her light on it.

CURANDERA

You'll only get the rooster's claw. It's a little dangerous and not very reliable.

CURANDERA hands the claw to SOFÍA.

SOFÍA

Show me how to use this! My life could not get any worse than it is now.

CURANDERA

Yes? Well, this is what you do.

All flashlights are out except for SOFÍA's, which she keeps shining on her face to record her actions. The choreography as to who holds the hoop, and who draws the line and snaps it can be worked out between the actors and director. Also, the actors and directors should feel free to add sound effects for the actions.

CURANDERA

First, you take the rooster's claw and draw a circle in the dirt, one big enough for you to stand inside of. Then you scratch a line through the circle and make a wish. If your wish is going to come true, then the line will move. Very simple.

CURANDERA shines her light on her own face.

CURANDERA

(holding up the scarf)

Are you sure this is the best you can do?

SOFÍA

I'm sorry.

CURANDERA

Then go home. And remember -- a wish can be a dangerous thing!

CURANDERA disappears and NARRATOR appears.

NARRATOR

All the way home Sofía thought and thought about her first wish. She knew in her heart what she wanted, but it was too big, too frightening.

SOFÍA

I'll wish for something small first.

SOFÍA pulls out the rooster's claw and draws a circle in the air. Across the stage from her, the hoop appears again.

SOFÍA

Something easy.

SOFÍA draws the line through the circle. The rope appears.

SOFÍA

I want fifty pesos.

The rope snaps, and then the hoop and rope disappear.

NARRATOR

All the next day Sofía waited, but nothing happened. The next day, nothing. But on the third day, there was a knock at the door.

CURANDERA

(wearing some sort of disguise)

Delivery.

SOFÍA

What is it?

CURANDERA

Don't know. Found the address inside.

CURANDERA makes the motion of tossing something to SOFÍA. RAÚL holds a thing dowel with a wallet of some sort hanging at the end of it. CURANDERA turns her flashlight onto the wallet as it travels through space to land in SOFÍA's hands; SOFÍA takes it, and the line disappears. CURANDERA points her light back to her own face.

CURANDERA

Adios, and good luck.

CURANDERA points her flashlight at SOFÍA as SOFÍA turns hers off in order to look at the wallet and open it. Her actions follow NARRATOR's words.

NARRATOR

She knew this wallet -- she knew it very well because she had made it. It had been in Raúl's pocket the day he left for the market so many years before. She ached to ask the messenger so many questions, but he had disappeared. And inside the wallet, she found what she had wished for: fifty pesos, sewed into a secret pocket she had made for Raúl. She did not know what to do. She did not know what to say.

SOFÍA holds the money aloft in one hand, and the lights of CURANDERA, NARRATOR, and RAÚL shine up at it. Suddenly, they snap out and at the same time SOFÍA turns her own light on her face.

SOFÍA

Maybe he's still alive!

NARRATOR turns his own light on his face.

NARRATOR

And that thought burned in her brain.

SOFÍA sits and takes out the rooster's claw. RAÚL goes to the back of the house, taking the white half-mask with him, and CURANDERA and NARRATOR get the hoop and rope ready.

SOFÍA

(with increasing agitation)

Maybe he's still alive -- I'm sure there's a good reason why he didn't come back home. Maybe he was off making more money for us and he did send a message home but it got lost along the way -- and maybe he thinks I have forgotten him because I never answered the note and now he believes I don't love him anymore! Oh, but I do love him, I never stopped loving him.

As she says the next lines, she uses the claw to draw a circle and a line, and as she does so, the hoop and rope are revealed off to the side.

SOFÍA

The curandera said -- but surely his wallet is a good sign -- but I am so afraid, and it's been such a long time!

SOFÍA begins drawing the circle and line, almost as if she cannot stop herself.

SOFÍA

My hand -- It's as if I cannot stop it! No, wait! Yes, go! Go! The line -- yes! I love you, Raúl -- please come home. Please come home to me!

The line snaps, and then the hoop and rope disappear. Immediately she looks up, as if looking down the road. Just as immediately, RAÚL speaks from the back of the house.

RAÚL

Sofía! Sofía!

SOFÍA

He's coming!

NARRATOR

Far on down the road she could see a figure moving toward her, and her heart leapt for joy because she could see that he walked with a slight limp, just as her beloved Raúl had done.

RAÚL

Sofía! Sofía!

SOFÍA

He's coming closer!

RAÚL walks toward the stage, and CURANDERA begins making the sound of his step/limp combination: a heavy sound for the good foot, and a shussing sound for the drag of the leg, something like "boomp/sshhh, boomp/sshhh."

NARRATOR

Indeed, he came closer and closer, and her heart beat faster and faster.

RAÚL turns his light on, revealing that he is wearing the half-mask.

NARRATOR

But when he got close, she pulled back in horror because where there had been eyes --

SOFÍA

There were only holes!

NARRATOR

Where there had been skin --

SOFÍA
Only the bones of his skull!

NARRATOR
Where there had been a mouth --

RAÚL
Give me a kiss!

SOFÍA
You have no mouth!

NARRATOR
Sofía ran into the house.

SOFÍA
You are not my husband!

RAÚL faces the audience, reaching out with one hand. SOFÍA is behind and above him. They both hold their lights on their faces. CURANDERA stops making the sound when RAÚL stops moving.

RAÚL
Robbers killed me, Sofía --

NARRATOR
Now she knew the truth.

RAÚL
My soul has never been at rest since. You have called me home. I have come home.

As NARRATOR speaks, RAÚL and SOFÍA move through their "house." CURANDERA will make any necessary sound effects, including his "limp."

NARRATOR
She ran into the house and locked the door. He banged and banged on the door until it broke. She ran out the back door and then locked it, and she stood in the yard, listening to him move through the house.

RAÚL
Sofía! Sofía! Kiss me! I have come home!

SOFÍA
Never --

NARRATOR
She yelled --

SOFÍA

I do not want this wish anymore!

NARRATOR

She heard the curandera's voice --

CURANDERA

Sometimes it is not very reliable.

NARRATOR

And she realized that she only had one choice left.

SOFÍA

The rooster's claw!

Just as before, SOFÍA draws a circle and a line, and the hoop and rope are revealed. RAÚL gets closer and closer, arm outstretched.

RAÚL

Sofía! Sofía!

SOFÍA

Go back to the grave!

The line snaps, and RAÚL's light goes off. Everything becomes quiet for two or three beats; all the audience sees is SOFÍA's face, in anguish.

SOFÍA

Raúl. Raúl. I still love you.

NARRATOR

The next day, Sofía went to the curandera to return the rooster's claw.

CURANDERA and SOFÍA meet.

SOFÍA

Here -- take it.

CURANDERA

It didn't work out?

SOFÍA

Yes -- and no.

CURANDERA

That's what they all say when they bring it back. Why do you think I had it to give to you?

Light out on CURANDERA. SOFÍA faces the audience. CURANDERA and RAÚL come downstage in order to shine their lights on NARRATOR and SOFÍA, to give them more light.

SOFÍA

And so, I learned my lesson.

NARRATOR

That she did.

SOFÍA

It was better for a widow to accept her bad luck
--

NARRATOR

Much better --

SOFÍA

-- and not wish for too much.

NARRATOR

It doesn't pay to get too selfish because you
will have to pay a price.

SOFÍA

Don't wish for too much, and you will turn out to
be a good person.

NARRATOR

That's right, a good person -- that's the lesson
we want you all to take home with you.

SOFÍA

Just shut your mouth and live your life.

NARRATOR

Thanks, Sofía -- that's really all you need to
say.

SOFÍA

Be humble -- especially if you're a girl -- and
don't bother anybody.

NARRATOR

Sofía --

SOFÍA

Nope, not a peep.

NARRATOR

Sofía!

SOFÍA
Not even one tiny whisper.

NARRATOR
Sofía, that's enough.

SOFÍA
See, just like right now. I can't get one little word in edgewise.

NARRATOR
The actors want to thank you for coming today --

SOFÍA
She was a nasty old woman!

NARRATOR
(slightly confused)
What?

SOFÍA
What a nasty old woman!

NARRATOR
Who?

SOFÍA
(not paying attention to him)
Curandera, a healer? Huh! She knew my heart was broken because I lost my Raúl -- and what does she give me? A hug? Some hot tea? Naw, she gives me the rooster's claw!

CURANDERA hands it to her.

NARRATOR
(to the audience)
This is not how it's supposed to end. Excuse us for a moment --

Again, not hearing NARRATOR but speaking to the audience. Holding up the claw.

SOFÍA
"Unreliable?" It was completely dangerous! And still she gives it to me. I am done with her, and with all the nasty, uncaring people like her. In fact -- in fact, I am done with this whole village.

NARRATOR
Sofía, you're supposed to say --

SOFÍA

I know what I am supposed to say.

NARRATOR

She's supposed to say that she learned how to be humble and polite --

SOFÍA

Humble and polite --

NARRATOR

-- and not wish for too much because --

SOFÍA

Because if you wish for too much, you'll be punished for being greedy. Right?

NARRATOR

That was the point.

SOFÍA

Well, was it too much to want to know why my husband disappeared?

NARRATOR

Well, no -- but --

SOFÍA

Was it too much to want to kiss the one person I loved the most?

NARRATOR

Not when you put it like that.

SOFÍA

I bet she got a big laugh from it all.

NARRATOR

I don't know.

SOFÍA

Well, I'm done with it.

NARRATOR

What?

SOFÍA

The kind of thinking that says that I can't feel what I feel and wish for what I want.

(to the audience)
What do you think? Do you think I should stay or
that I should get out of here?

She works with the audience to get a response to leave; then, to
NARRATOR and audience.

SOFÍA
See, my lesson from all this? Don't connect with
nasty people. Don't stay in the same room with
people who have black thoughts. Don't believe
people that tell you you can't do something you
want to do. I'm not hanging around with you
anymore.

(indicating the audience)
I'm going to hang around with them, with the good
folks.

SOFÍA pulls the fifty pesos out of her pocket and holds it aloft. One
of the lights goes to her hand.

SOFÍA
I have money, and I'm going to go on a trip.
Thank you, Raúl -- in a way, you did come home
and help me out.

(to the audience)
See you all soon.
(to NARRATOR)
See you never again.

SOFÍA switches off her light or points it at NARRATOR.

NARRATOR
(slightly at a loss for words)
Well, uh, hmm -- That Sofía -- what a
trickster, huh!

Lights on CURANDERA and RAÚL.

NARRATOR
(to the others)
Hmm -- what do we do now? Well, I guess I have
only one thing left to say -- The End.

As each speaks, light out.

RAÚL
The end.

CURANDERA
The end.

NARRATOR

The end.

All lights back to her.

SOFÍA

No, no, no, tontos -- the beginning. And I'm
off.

Light out on SOFÍA. Lights come up on actors. Applause.