



Odin Webster

Adapted from the "The Bottle Imp" by Robert Louis Stevenson

Norman Maine Publishing

THE BOTTLE DEMON
2

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THE BOTTLE DEMON

CLASSIC. Adapted from “The Bottle Imp” by Robert Louis Stevenson. Keawe, a poor sailor, buys a glass bottle with a demon living inside it that will grant its owner any wish. Of course, there is a catch...or two. If the owner dies before he can sell the bottle to someone else, his soul will forever burn in hell. In addition, the bottle must be sold for less than what was paid for it or it. Eager to test the bottle demon, Keawe wishes for a mansion on a large estate and then quickly sells the bottle. Soon after, Keawe discovers he has contracted leprosy and knows the only way to cure himself and proceed with his upcoming wedding is to find the bottle and buy it back. Keawe locates the current owner but discovers that the bottle was purchased for only two cents. If Keawe buys the cursed bottle, he will be able to marry his true love but he will burn in hell for all eternity. Keawe purchases the bottle anyway, and with the help of his clever wife, the two discover the perfect solution to their quandary! Twists and turns abound in this enchanting, easy-to-stage play.

Performance time: Approximately 45 minutes.

THE BOTTLE DEMON 4



Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), gravestone in Samoa

ABOUT THE STORY

Author Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) was born in Edinburg, Scotland. Stevenson based the "The Bottle Imp" on a German legend and on his 1889 visit to Hawaii. Stevenson set the story in the town of Ho'okena on the Kona coast of the island of Hawaii. The character of Kokua was named after the Hawaiian word "kōkua," which means "help." The premise of the story involves a paradox that can be resolved in four ways: 1.) Someone irrationally decides to buy the bottle; 2.) Someone buys the bottle because he believes he is immortal; 3.) Someone buys the bottle, knowingly sacrificing his soul to save another; 4.) Someone buys the bottle because he is destined to go to hell anyway. Stevenson died on the island of Samoa when he was 44 years old and is buried on a spot overlooking the sea. His tombstone reads:

"Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.
This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

CHARACTERS

(3 M, 1 F, 8 flexible, extras)

(With doubling: 3 M, 1 F, 4 flexible)

KEAWE: Poor sailor who lives on the Island of Hawaii and yearns to have a beautiful house and garden on the Kona coast; wears a Hawaiian shirt, pants, and a pea coat; male.

KOKUA: Keawe's loyal, intelligent wife; wears a traditional Hawaiian dress; female.

LOPAKA: One of Keawe's shipmates who yearns to buy his own schooner; male.

MAN/WOMAN: Elderly, wealthy resident of San Francisco who Keawe buys the bottle demon from; flexible. (Note: If male, he has a bald head and a black beard. If female, she has gray hair.)

LAWYER: Lawyer who informs Keawe of his uncle's inheritance; flexible.

ARCHITECT: Architect who draws up plans for Keawe's dream house; flexible.

YOUNG MAN/YOUNG WOMAN: Purchases the bottle demon for two cents; face is white as a corpse with black around eyes; flexible.

OLD MAN/OLD WOMAN: Elderly, poor stranger in Tahiti who purchases the bottle demon from Kokua; flexible.

BOATSWAIN: A scalawag who purchases the bottle demon and refuses to sell it; wears a pea coat; male.

FRIEND: One of Keawe's friends; flexible.

VILLAGER 1, 2: Hawaiian villagers; flexible.

EXTRAS: As Villagers and Sailors.

OPTIONS FOR DOUBLING

LAWYER/BOATSWAIN (flexible)
ARCHITECT/VILLAGER 1 (flexible)
FRIEND/VILLAGER 2 (flexible)
OLD MAN/YOUNG MAN (flexible)

SETTINGS

1800s, San Francisco, Hawaii, and Tahiti.

SET

Sets may be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows. In many cases, a bare stage or a simple backdrop will suffice.

San Francisco. There is a backdrop depicting a street lined with grand houses. One house is smaller than the others and has a garden border and bright windows.

Aboard a ship. A backdrop of the interior of a ship may be used or a bare stage will suffice.

Hawaiian beach. A backdrop of a beach or a bare stage will suffice.

Lawyer's office. There is a desk and 3 chairs.

Exterior of Ka-Hale Nui, "The Bright House." Backdrop depicts a house three stories high on a mountainside that overlooks the sea. Behind the house is a forest and black lava cliffs. Blooming flowers in every hue surround the house and there is an orchard of papaya on one side and an orchard of breadfruit on the other. In front of the house, a ship's mast bears a flag. The house has broad balconies and many windows. There are two elegant-looking chairs for actors to sit on.

Outside a Hawaiian café. There are a couple of small tables with chairs.

Interior of Ka-Hale Nui, "The Bright House." Pictures of ships and battles hang on the wall in golden frames. The room is filled with fine clocks, musical boxes, books, and prized weapons from all over of the world.

Tahiti. There is a backdrop depicting a shore with green trees and small white houses. Mountains and clouds are seen overhead. There is a freestanding banana tree.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: San Francisco, noon.

Scene 2: Aboard a ship, later that day.

Scene 3: Hawaiian beach, days later.

Scene 4: Lawyer's office, a short time later.

Scene 5: Outside Keawe's new home, months later.

Scene 6: Hawaiian beach, months later.

Scene 7: Interior of Keawe's home, the next day.

Scene 8: Hawaiian village, outside a café.

Scene 9: Interior of Keawe's home, weeks later.

Scene 10: Tahiti.

Scene 11: Tahiti, nighttime, a short time later.

Scene 12: Tahiti, the next morning.

Scene 13: Tahiti, a village café, a short time later.

Scene 14: Tahiti, evening, a short time later.

Scene 15: Tahiti, evening, a short time later.

Scene 16: Tahiti, evening, a short time later.

PROPS

Lock box	Deck of cards
Round-bellied bottle with a long neck (plastic)	2 Glasses
\$50 bill (play money)	2 Pennies
Pea coat, for Keawe	Elegant-looking clothes, for Kokua
Corkscrew	Fine-looking clothes, for Keawe
Chest	Misc. rich-looking household items
Sketches of houses	Lamp
Pen	Fake coins (for centimes)
Piece of paper	Lit lamppost
Contract	Rum bottle
Fake money	
Red holoku (Hawaiian dress), for Kokua	

THE BOTTLE DEMON
2

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Bottle with glowing red light that
moves (can be achieved with a
laser light/laser cat toy)
Glass shattering
Face of the demon projected on
the back wall
Sound of horse hooves
Blazing fire (lighting effect)

Sound of crackling flames
Burst of wind
Wind blowing and leaves
rustling
Roaring wind
Ominous shadows
Smoke, opt.

"HERE, NOW,
I AM BOUND
TO THE BOTTLE DEMON
FOR TIME AND FOR ETERNITY,
AND I HAVE NO BETTER HOPE
BUT TO BE A CINDER FOREVER
IN THE FLAMES OF HELL."

-KEAVE

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: San Francisco, noon. There is a backdrop depicting a street lined with grand houses. Keawe enters, admiring the great houses.)

KEAWE: What fine houses these are and how happy must those people be who dwell in them and take no care for the morrow!

(Keawe walks up to a house that is smaller than the others. The steps of the house shine like silver, the borders of the garden are in bloom, and the windows are bright. As Keawe admires the house, he sees a Man looking at him through a window. The man's face is heavy with sorrow and he bitterly sighs. All of a sudden, the Man smiles and nods, beckoning Keawe to approach. The Man meets Keawe at the door of his house.)

MAN: This is a fine house of mine. Would you not care to view the chambers?

KEAWE: Truly, this is a beautiful house. If I lived in it I would laugh all day long. How comes it, then, that you should be sighing?

MAN: There is no reason why you should not have a house similar to this—and finer—if you wish. You have some money, I suppose?

KEAWE: I have 50 dollars, but a house like this will cost more than 50 dollars.

(Man makes a mental computation.)

MAN: I am sorry you have no more money, for it may cause you trouble in the future...but it shall be yours at 50 dollars.

KEAWE: The house?

MAN: No, not the house...the bottle. For, I must tell you, although I appear to you rich and fortunate, all my

THE BOTTLE DEMON

11

fortune—and this house itself and its garden—came out of a bottle not much bigger than a pint. *(Man opens a locked box and takes out a round-bellied bottle with a long neck. The glass of it is white like milk. The bottle glows red or a small red light inside it moves. NOTE: This lighting effect can be done with a laser light if desired.)* This is the bottle. *(Keawe laughs.)* You do not believe me? Try, then, for yourself. See if you can break it.

(Keawe takes the bottle and dashes it on the floor till he is weary but he cannot break it. Note: Bottle can be made of plastic and sound effects of glass hitting concrete can be used.)

KEAWE: This is a strange thing, for by the touch of it as well as by its look, the bottle should be made of glass.

MAN: Of glass it is... *(Sighs heavily.)* ...but the glass of it was tempered in the flames of hell. A demon lives in it and that is the shadow we behold there moving... *(Holds up bottle and the red light moves.)* ...or so I suppose. If any man buy this bottle, the demon is at his command. All that he desires—love, fame, money, houses like this house, ay, or a city like this city—are all his. Napoleon had this bottle and by it he grew to be the king of the world. But he sold it at the last and fell. Captain Cook had this bottle, and by it he found his way to so many islands. But he, too, sold it and was slain in Hawaii. For once it is sold, the power and the protection go, and unless a man remain content with what he has, ill will befall him.

KEAWE: And yet you talk of selling it yourself...

MAN: I have all I wish, and I am growing elderly. There is one thing the demon cannot do: He cannot prolong life. And it would not be fair to conceal from you that there is a drawback to the bottle...for if a man die before he sells it, he will burn in hell forever.

KEAWE: To be sure, that is a drawback. And make no mistake, I would not meddle with the thing. I can do without a house, but I cannot do with being damned.

MAN: Dear me, you must not run away with things. All you have to do is to use the power of the demon in moderation and then sell it to someone else, as I do to you, and finish your life in comfort.

KEAWE: (*Suspiciously.*) Well, I observe two things. All the time you keep sighing like a maid in love, that is one. And for the other, you sell this bottle very cheap.

MAN: I have told you already why I sigh—it is because I fear my health is getting worse. And as you said yourself, to die and go to the devil is a pity for anyone. As for why I sell it so cheap, I must explain to you there is a peculiarity about the bottle. Long ago, when the devil brought it first upon earth, it was extremely expensive and was sold first to Prester John for many millions of dollars, but it cannot be sold unless sold at a loss. If you sell it for as much as you paid for it, back it comes to you again like a homing pigeon. It follows that the price has kept falling through the centuries and the bottle is now remarkably cheap. I bought it myself from one of my great neighbors on this hill, and the price I paid was only 90 dollars. I could sell it for as high as 89 dollars and 99 cents but not a penny more or back the thing will come to me. Now, about this, there are two rules: first, when you offer a bottle for so little, people suppose you to be jesting; and, second— (*Stops himself. Slight pause.*) But there is no hurry about that, and I need not go into it. Only remember it must be coined money that you sell it for.

KEAWE: How am I to know that this is all true?

MAN: Some of it you can try at once. Give me your 50 dollars, take the bottle, and wish your 50 dollars back into your pocket. If that does not happen, I pledge, on my honor, I will restore your money.

KEAWE: You are not deceiving me? (*Man swears an oath.*) Well, I will risk that much, for that can do no harm. (*Keawe*

THE BOTTLE DEMON
13

pays the Man, and the Man hands Keawe the bottle.) Demon of the bottle, I want my 50 dollars back. (Keawe checks his pocket and pulls out \$50. Surprised.) To be sure, this is a wonderful bottle!

MAN: And, now, good morning to you, my fine fellow, and the devil go with you.

KEAWE: Hold on, I don't want any more of this fun. *(Holding out bottle.)* Here, take your bottle back.

MAN: You have bought it for less than I paid for it. *(Rubbing his hands together.)* It is yours now, and for my part, I am only concerned to see the back of you.

(Man grins and exits into his house. Keawe just stands there holding the bottle under his arm.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]