

# One Little Wish

## SYNOPSIS

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### Act One

It's the mid-Eighteenth Century in the colonial backwater of Paraguay. An old, bitter man, Rodrigo Gruñón, lives alone in a house with only his pear tree for comfort. Señor Gruñón previously had a youthful love affair with a young girl named Adrianna and planted the tree as a symbol of their love – but Adrianna deserted her young lover and left him alone with the pear tree. Now, however, to Señor Gruñón's dismay, the pear tree is threatened by predatory young children (the two lovers Ana and Pepe) and a tax-happy bureaucrat (Moríñigo, Secretary of the Cabildo of Asunción) who routinely come to steal its pears.

A solution appears when Señor Gruñón finds that a beggar he feeds is, in fact, none other than Saint Peter. Peter, touched by the old man's generosity, offers to grant him one wish. Señor Gruñón wishes for anyone who tries to take his pears to be stuck up the pear tree until he wishes them down again – a curse which soon works well... too well. The curse not only scares off young lovers and annoying tax collectors, but also ends with Death being trapped in the tree, when he comes to take Señor Gruñón into the afterlife.

The terribly bored government of Paraguay – consisting of Larrázabal, the well-meaning governor, and Fontes and Burios, two dimwitted magistrates – is soon besieged with complaints against Señor Gruñón and his pear tree. Up until now, an elegant, if mysterious, widow, La Señora Maravilla, has defended the old man from afar, keeping enemies at bay; but now that Death's up a tree – which is to say no one anywhere is dying, because Death cannot make his rounds – a mob, led by the ever-predatory Moríñigo, cannot be prevented from besieging the old man and threatening his demise.

## **Act Two**

Four months later; Señor Gruñón is in solitary confinement, Death is still up the tree, and no one anywhere is dying – chaos reigns. La Señora Maravilla takes charge by revealing to the forlorn old man that her mother was Adrianna (his younger lover of old) and that Adrianna left him because her father found out about their affair. La Señora Maravilla then offers to make a crafty bargain with Death: Señor Gruñón will release Death from the pear tree if Death takes him briefly to the afterlife to reunite with Adrianna. Death agrees, cheekily; but then La Señora Maravilla takes off Death's masks, revealing that Death is, in fact, a woman – and a very beautiful one at that. If Death double-crosses Señor Gruñón and leaves him in the afterlife, she will stay forever unmasked – unfeared and unfretted.

Death reluctantly takes Señor Gruñón to Heaven, where the old man meets Adrianna and comes to terms with his past. However, after returning to Earth – all is normal again – Señor Gruñón sees little point in living. La Señora Maravilla, widowed and alone, then suggests that she and the old man live together as father and daughter, treasuring each other's company and finding the gems of life that have been denied them.