

CONFLICT

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By **Wade Bradford**

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SYNOPSIS: A very amusing explanation of how we crave stories in which the protagonist experiences all kinds of hardship. *Conflict* won the "Page to Stage" competition at the Repertory East Playhouse in Santa Clarita, California.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(THREE MEN, TWO WOMEN, ONE NON-GENDER SPECIFIC)

NARRATOR (m or f)(66 lines)

PROTAGONIST (m)(92 lines)

WOMAN #1.....Plays Protagonist's spouse and later, "man vs. woman" lady love. (22 lines)

WOMAN #2.....Plays Protagonist's mother. (21 lines)

ANTAGONIST #1 (m).....Plays Angry Farmer. (24 lines)

ANTAGONIST #2 (m).....Plays Protagonist's father, Con Artist, and later, Zeus. (28 lines)

Set:

A blank stage.

Costumes:

Doesn't matter.

Budget:

The cost of a single cantaloupe.

Casting:

Doubling is optional: Woman #1 could be played by two female actors and Antagonist #2 could be played by three male actors.

AT RISE:

The Narrator (male or female) stands downstage right. Upstage left, a man – the Protagonist – lies on the floor, curled up in a fetal position.

NARRATOR: A story begins.

Lights come up on Protagonist.

NARRATOR: A child is born.

Protag (as we shall now call him) stretches, cries like a newborn baby.

NARRATOR: He grows into a man.

Protag quickly “grows” and assumes a manly pose.

NARRATOR: He experiences happiness.

PROTAG: (*Very happy.*) Ah!

NARRATOR: He experiences sadness.

PROTAG: (*Very sad.*) Aw . . .

NARRATOR: He meets a girl.

Woman #1 approaches Protag.

PROTAG: Hello!

WOMAN #1: Hello.

NARRATOR: They fall in love. They get married. They go on their honeymoon.

The blocking for the above actors is entirely up to the director's discretion.

NARRATOR: They have four children.

From somewhere offstage, an unseen cast member tosses four baby dolls. Protag lovingly catches them one after another. He drops the fourth one.

NARRATOR: Three children.

Protag and Woman #1 lean against each other, adoring their children.

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NARRATOR: The children grow up and move away.

PROTAG: *(Tossing the babies back to cast member.)* G'bye kids.
Good luck with college!

NARRATOR: There's a fifty-fifty chance that he and his wife divorce.

Woman #1 flips a coin. She looks at it. Shrugs at Protag and then leaves.

NARRATOR: All alone, the man grows old.

Protag sags a little.

NARRATOR: Older . . .

Protag hunches over, waddling about like a very old man.

NARRATOR: Olllderrr . . . and dies.

Protag falls over, lifeless.

NARRATOR: The end.

The Narrator lifts up Protag's wrist and lets it drop down to the floor.

NARRATOR: Not very satisfying, is it? And why? The story had no conflict. Conflict is struggle, a quest, a battle, a challenge, a longing, an agony, a goal that seems forever out of our grasp. We, as an audience, desire, nay, we demand that our characters experience conflict.

As the Narrator speaks, he stands the Protag back up, and arranges him as if working with a sculpture or a mannequin.

NARRATOR: And why do we crave hardship for our main character? Why must he be tortured emotionally and sometimes physically? *Because it is fun to watch.* Here stands a man, but he cannot become a hero until I, the narrator, give him conflict. We need something besides the protagonist on stage. We need something . . . an object that will elicit desire and ultimately suffering. It could be anything, really . . . excuse me, madam . . .

He speaks to Woman #2, an older woman who sits in the second row.
[**Note:** *She should at first seem like an ordinary audience member.*]

WOMAN #2: Yes?

NARRATOR: Do you have something in your purse we could use?

WOMAN #2: Oh, like what?

NARRATOR: A stick of gum, or eyeliner, perhaps. The first thing you find will do. We simply need an object of desire for our protagonist.

WOMAN #2: I'm afraid all I have is a cantaloupe.

NARRATOR: That's perfect. Now we can begin the story again and generate enough conflict to please the cruelest of audiences. A story begins . . . a child is born . . . and at three years of age . . .

PROTAG: I'm three years old . . .

NARRATOR: At the age of three years, he discovered that he absolutely loved cantaloupes.

The toddler-minded Protagonist sees the cantaloupe. The Narrator holds it out, enticing Protag. Protag toddles across the stage.

PROTAG: Canna-wope!

NARRATOR: That's right, little protagonist, that's right! No one knew why the little boy loved cantaloupes. Maybe it was the wondrous globe shape, maybe it was the subtle yet heavenly aroma, or maybe it was the fact that he severely lacked Vitamin C. Whatever the reason, he wanted this spherical fruit. But he could not have it.

The Narrator tosses the cantaloupe to Antagonist #1, a man who behaves like an angry old farmer.

ANTAG #1: You rascal! Get off my property. This is my cantaloupe farm!

NARRATOR: Our first conflict, Man versus Man. The protagonist wants one thing . . .

PROTAG: Canna-wope!

NARRATOR: And the Antagonist wants to prevent our hero from getting it.

ANTAG #1: Oh, no you don't, you ain't gettin' your fat, dirty fingers on my prize winning cantaloupe. I'm building me a fence around my whole farm. You'll never get one of my cantaloupes! Ever!

Protag grabs the cantaloupe. They pull back and forth.

PROTAG: Mine!

ANTAG #1: No!

PROTAG: Mine!

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ANTAG #1: No!

PROTAG: Mine!

ANTAG #1: I said NO!

Antag #1 pushes Protag to the ground. Protag cries.

NARRATOR: And so the forces against the protagonist win the first battle. But when our hero feels that all is lost, that is when a supporting character steps in to encourage him. (*Talks to the same woman sitting in the second row.*) Excuse me again, do you happen to have a tissue?

WOMAN #2: Why, yes I do.

NARRATOR: Excellent. Could you offer one to that young man over there?

WOMAN #2: On stage?

NARRATOR: Yes.

WOMAN #2: But . . . what do I do . . . ?

NARRATOR: Just be his mother . . . it shouldn't take more than five minutes of your time . . . why look, he's reaching out to you.

PROTAG: (*Reaches out to Woman #2 as she approaches.*) Mama?

NARRATOR: Go to him. He needs you.

PROTAG: Mama!

WOMAN #2: Oh, uh, here junior . . . (*Offers tissue.*) Dry your tears. (*He wipes his whole face on her sleeve/blouse.*) Ugh. Now, uh, junior, why are you so sad?

PROTAG: Because I wanna canna-wope an' I canna have one!

Antag #1 waltzes across the stage, dancing about with the cantaloupe, teasing the Protagonist.

ANTAG #1: Looks delicious, doesn't it? (*Brings it close to Protagonist.*)

Protagonist reaches for it.

ANTAG #1: (*Quickly drawing back.*) Can't have it! (*Exits, laughing cruelly.*)

Protag cries some more while Woman #2 consoles him.

WOMAN #2: There, there. Don't let Farmer Antagonist antagonize you. Maybe I have something in my purse that you'll like. (*She pulls out a makeup case.*) Want to play with this?

PROTAG: No!

WOMAN #2: Tic tac?

PROTAG: No!

WOMAN #2: Car keys?

PROTAG: Me don't want car keys! Me want canna-wope!

WOMAN #2: Well, junior, you're a smart boy. I'm sure you'll find a way to have a cantaloupe of your very own.

PROTAG: A canna-wope of my vewy own?

WOMAN #2: Here, maybe this will help.

She gives him a book, pats his head and exits the stage.

NARRATOR: The book she gave him changed his life . . . as soon as he was old enough to read, that is . . .

PROTAG: "The Science of Cantaloupe Farming."

NARRATOR: As the years passed, the Protagonist learned all there was to know about cantaloupes. He memorized that book from one cover to the next. By the time he was seventeen, he was ready to grow his own delicious melon.

Protag is now center stage, on his hands and knees, gardening.

PROTAG: There! The soil is just right. And now, to plant my cantaloupe seed.

ANTAG #1: So, finally getting around to making your own melon? Well, it won't taste as good as mine!

PROTAG: You're wrong about that, old timer! It'll be ten times better than your mangy vegetation, and you know why? Because I'm planting my cantaloupe with soil, compost, and the most important nutrient of all, love. *(Plants seed.)*

Antag #1 shrugs and walks away with a grunt.

NARRATOR: And yet there are many variations of conflict of Man versus Man. There is something far worse than Man versus Farmer. Enter the new conflict Man versus Father.

A fatherly Antagonist #2 enters.

ANTAG #2: Son! Oh son! I've got good news - hey what are you doing with that watering can?

PROTAG: *(Tries to hide the can.)* Uh, nothing!

ANTAG #2: Son . . . you've been trying to raise cantaloupes again, haven't you?

PROTAG: Dad, I -

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ANTAG #2: How very disappointing. And here I was just about to congratulate . . . I thought you were ready to come work for me . . . as my partner!

PROTAG: But Dad! I don't want to go into the pumpkin business!

ANTAG #2: Pumpkins aren't good enough for you? Huh?! You love cantaloupes exclusively, is that it?

PROTAG: I do. And I've just planted my first one. And I'm going to grow it on my own.

ANTAG #2: You disappoint me. When you were younger I wanted to put a stop to this cantaloupe nonsense. No son of mine was going to be a fruity weirdo! But your mother said, "It's just a phase. He'll grow out of it." And now look at you, rejecting the family business for this . . . this frivolous desire. Well I'm putting a stop to it. I'm digging up that seed before it takes root.

PROTAG: Father, I love you, but if you touch my cantaloupe garden I'll never speak to you again.

ANTAG #2: So that's it, huh? You would choose a fruit over the wishes of your family.

PROTAG: I'm growing this melon and there's nothing you can do about it!

ANTAG #2: Then I have no son!

Antag #2 exits.

PROTAG: Dad? (*Remorseful, then turns defiant.*) Fine . . . Fine! I don't need you. I don't need anyone. Right, little seed. Don't mind us humans as we argue over petty things. You just rest and grow.

NARRATOR: The days passed by without contact with his family . . . until . . .

Woman #2 (Mom) enters carrying a blanket.

PROTAG: Momma?

WOMAN #2: I brought you a blanket. Are you sure you don't want to come back into the house?

PROTAG: Not until Dad admit he's wrong!

WOMAN #2: Junior . . . your father and I are moving.

PROTAG: Moving? Where?

WOMAN #2: To Pumpkinville.

PROTAG: When?

WOMAN #2: Five minutes. Your father says he's never coming back. And we'll never see you again.

She sobs. She hugs her son and wipes her tears (and nose) against her son's sleeves.

WOMAN #2: Oh look! *(Points to the ground.)*

PROTAG: My cantaloupe! It's sprouting!

WOMAN #2: Oh junior, your dreams are coming true! I wish you all the happiness in the world. Goodbye, my sweet baby boy. *(She runs away, crying. Exits.)*

PROTAG: Wait! Mom! Don't leave. I'll go with . . . *(He starts to follow, then slowly comes to a halt. He knows that he belongs by his garden.)* Goodbye Mom. *(Kneels down next to plant.)* Don't worry, little cantaloupe. We'll make it somehow. Now that you're growing, that's all I need. Nothing will hinder us now.

Thunder sound effect.

NARRATOR: Man versus nature. As the protagonist tended his garden, the elements fought against him.

Rain sound effect. Protag feels drops of rain. He covers himself, helplessly. The Narrator hands him an umbrella.

NARRATOR: Man versus rain.

Wind sound effect. Protag tumbles over, then stands up, acting as though he is fighting against a strong wind.

NARRATOR: Man versus wind!

Protag manages to get back to center stage.

NARRATOR: Man versus lightning.

Lighting cue and "ZAP" sound effect. Protag acts as though he's been suddenly electrocuted.

PROTAG: Ow!

Lighting cue: the stage glows with a red tint.

NARRATOR: Man versus extreme temperature.

PROTAG: *(Fanning the plant.)* Poor little cantaloupe. It's so hot. But at least it's a dry heat.

NARRATOR: Man versus humidity.

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Protag lets out a sigh of frustration. He fans himself rapidly.

NARRATOR: Man versus mosquitoes.

Mosquito sound effect. Protag slaps himself, swatting at the bugs.

NARRATOR: Man versus killer bees.

PROTAG: (*Flailing about, warding off a swarm.*) Oh come on!

Lighting cue: the lights change to a tint of icy blue.

NARRATOR: Man versus extreme cold.

PROTAG: Don't worry, my little friend. I'll protect you from the frost.

He curls up around the plant. He seems to fall asleep.

NARRATOR: Months of struggling passed by . . . and finally, the day arrived. The day he thought all of his hopes and dreams had finally come true.

The Narrator places the cantaloupe center stage. Protag awakens.

PROTAG: My cantaloupe! You're here! You're finally here! Now at long last I can quench my desires and partake in your deliciousness. All I need now is a melon baller.

NARRATOR: But then he encountered a conflict greater than the forces of nature.

Woman #1 steps onto the stage.

NARRATOR: Man versus woman.

WOMAN #1: (*Approaches Protag.*) Hello.

PROTAG: H . . . Hello . . .

They stare at each other.

PROTAG: Why are you looking at me that way?

WOMAN #1: Because I see a man who is no longer a boy and I am captivated by the sight of him. As I look at your rain-drenched clothes, I can feel the storms you have weathered, all alone, and it makes me want to end your loneliness. As I look at the dirt caked into the palms of your hands, I can feel the struggle you have undergone, the struggle to create beauty, and I long to join you in your struggles. As I look at your eyes, I can feel them searching,

searching for love, gazing endlessly; oh would that I could end your search.

PROTAG: As I look at you . . . I think you're pretty.

WOMAN #1: I, too, find you attractive. How long have you been tending this garden?

PROTAG: Almost nine months.

WOMAN #1: That shows you're not afraid of commitment, that you are earnest and faithful. And why have you been struggling so?

PROTAG: (*Presenting cantaloupe.*) To bring life into this world.

WOMAN #1: You'll make a wonderful father someday, hopefully soon. Do you really think that I'm pretty?

PROTAG: More than pretty. Beautiful. I . . . I love you.

WOMAN #1: And I love you.

PROTAG: (*Kneeling.*) Would you be my wife? I will share everything in the world with you. Even the thing that I hold dearest to me. (*Offers cantaloupe.*)

WOMAN #1: (*Guiding him back to his feet.*) Yes, my soulmate, yes! Let's run away and be with each other forever and ever. (*About to embrace, she pauses and notices the cantaloupe for the first time.*) But you'll have to drop the melon - I'm allergic.

PROTAG: My cantaloupe? But I . . .

WOMAN #1: It's me or the melon. Your choice. I can see you need time to think. I'll be waiting over here . . . thinking romantic thoughts . . . about our honeymoon . . .

She slowly flits away, teasing as she goes. He watches her, then looks back at his cantaloupe.

PROTAG: But I haven't even tasted it yet . . .

He holds the fruit, arm outstretched. He weighs his choices.

NARRATOR: Man versus self.

Protag looks over his shoulder to his lady love, then back to his cantaloupe. He does this a couple times.

PROTAG: Maybe just one bite.

WOMAN #1: Don't take too long . . .

PROTAG: Just a moment, my darling one! (*About to bite into cantaloupe.*)

WOMAN #1: And don't get cantaloupe on your lips. I don't want to break out in hives.

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PROTAG: *(Frustrated. Sets the fruit down; speaks to it.)* Goodbye.
I'm so sorry it had to end like this.

He starts to walk away. He stops. He looks back. Then he runs to the cantaloupe, falls to his knees and cradles the melon in his arms.

PROTAG: I can't leave you!

WOMAN #1: *(As she walks off stage.)* Oh lover-boy! I'm waiting to consummate the relationship!

PROTAG: *(Abruptly abandons the cantaloupe.)* Gotta go!

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