

Love in the Time of Cockleburs  
A Short Comedy  
by Nancy Gall-Clayton



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## Love in the Time of Cockleburs

### Characters

Wally Weldon	Male, 30s, a forest ranger who takes his job seriously
Claire Sanders	Female, 30s, a costumer for the local opera, in awe of all things masculine
Bernadette Broussard	Female, late 50s, head costumer for the local opera, French, bossy, impressed with herself, an exercise fanatic
Sue “Madeleine” Jones	Female, 20s, college student, a writer (she thinks)
Harvey Whitcomb	Male, 30s-40s, wears a garment imprinted with something like “Property of ___ County Jail”), sweaty, polite

*Note: Ages are not critical though Bernadette should be older than Claire. Any character can be any race or ethnicity.*

### Time

The present, June, a Saturday morning around 9 a.m.

### Place

A trail entrance in a forest. A park bench is needed, nothing else.

### Synopsis

A forest ranger just wants to lead a hike, but those who have joined him – two costumers from the opera, a man who may be a jail escapee, and a would-be writer – have agendas of their own.

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AT RISE: WALLY addresses MADELEINE, who is scribbling furiously, CLAIRE who is listening but unhappy, and BERNADETTE who is doing pre-hike stretches, striking a yoga pose or two, and otherwise showing off.

WALLY

Let me see now. We've covered ticks, poison ivy, and the wildflowers you're most likely to see--

(HARVEY enters running, panting, exits running.)

CLAIRE

Did you see that, Bernadette?

WALLY

Whoa! Come back! I said come back!

(Pause. HARVEY enters)

WALLY (cont.)

Good man. Take a seat, catch your breath. Did you register for the hike?

HARVEY

Uh, no ...

WALLY

No problem. You're welcome to join us. We'll be starting momentarily.

BERNADETTE

Yes, Claire, I see him. I'm not blind!

CLAIRE

Not him, what he's wearing.

BERNADETTE

One size fits all, not my kind of thing.

CLAIRE

The color, I'm talking about that marvelous color.

MADELEINE

What's that called? I'm journaling about the hike. Salmon perhaps? Do you know, Ranger?

WALLY

I've caught salmon, and they aren't that color. But we need to get started.

BERNADETTE

Sometimes a color isn't the same color as an item with the name of the color.

MADELEINE

Huh?

CLAIRE

She taught me that the day I started working for her.

BERNADETTE

One of the few things she hasn't forgotten.

CLAIRE

Gee, thanks!

MADELEINE

Nobody answered my question about that color.

BERNADETTE

I brought you here so we could bond, build trust, and have shared experiences away from the costume shop. Whether you like it or not!

HARVEY

You ladies make costumes?

BERNADETTE

We ladies do. For the opera. I'm French.

HARVEY

And you have costume-making supplies in your room? Things you're sewing?

CLAIRE

Bernadette insisted that I sew while I'm here. I brought a cummerbund and a costume for Baron Zeta. It has epaulets on the shoulders.

BERNADETTE

Epaulets are, by definition, on the shoulders. And you wonder why you haven't gotten a raise.

CLAIRE

*(To HARVEY)* Would you like some water? I see you didn't bring a backpack for our hike.

WALLY

Everyone was supposed to bring water, but no matter, we'll share if needed. May I continue?

CLAIRE

You look handsome in a sweaty sort of way. Don't you think he would be perfect dancing as an extra in Act Three of *The Merry Widow*, Bernadette?

BERNADETTE

No.

HARVEY

What about the jacket with epaulets? Would it fit me?

CLAIRE

You're too ... muscular. ...Please, have some water. You were running very fast!

HARVEY

Is it Evian, by any chance?

CLAIRE

Alas, it's tap water.

WALLY

Why don't we get back on task?

CLAIRE

I don't have Evian in my backpack, I do have some in my room.

WALLY

The gentleman isn't thirsty. Shall we continue?

BERNADETTE

He dresses like that, but won't drink tap water.

HARVEY

Maybe you'd share your Evian later?

CLAIRE

I would.

WALLY

We need to stay on schedule.

MADELEINE

I don't mean to throw you off schedule, Ranger, but I'd like to put the real color in my journal.

WALLY

Answer the color question. If you can. If you can't, say so.

HARVEY

Yes, sir, the color of my uh ...

CLAIRE

Of your garment, you sweaty masculine man.

HARVEY

Orange?

CLAIRE  
No.

BERNADETTE  
No!

MADELEINE

How would you describe the Ranger's uniform?

CLAIRE  
Forest green.

BERNADETTE  
Olive green.

WALLY

(WALLY claps his hands to get everyone's attention)

Do you want to take a narrated hike today? If not, I suggest you go back to the lodge where you can study the birds and small mammals in the display case on your own.

BERNADETTE

I didn't come all the way here to see stuffed animals. Physical fitness and bonding with Claire, those are my goals! I'm French, you know.

WALLY

Then let me continue with the program.

HARVEY

Is it a short program, this pre-hike program of yours?

WALLY

You're anxious to get into the woods like me. Too bad you didn't arrive on time because we've already discussed ticks, poison ivy, and wildflowers.

HARVEY

I'm actually up-to-date on ticks and poison ivy. Wildflowers, not so much, but the sooner we start into the woods, the better.

CLAIRE

He's an athlete, can't you tell? He's probably done a triathlon or two. He wants to get moving.

HARVEY

I am. I do.

CLAIRE

Ranger, could I ask please the gentleman just one more quick question before we start?

WALLY

No!

MADELEINE

Did your wife burn the toast this morning?

WALLY

I don't have a wife! My toast was perfect! As were my eggs and apricot juice. What is wrong with you people?

CLAIRE

Apricot! Bernadette, is his garment apricot-colored?

BERNADETTE

Certainly not.

HARVEY

I'm ready to start the hike, sir. Perhaps you and I could just go ahead now while they talk.

MADELEINE

I'm ready to hike, too, Ranger, but I love knowing you cook. The food at my dorm is boring. You're a ranger and you cook, wow!

WALLY

I thought you were writing about the hike.

MADELEINE

The hike and you.

WALLY

Oh! I see, well, the last thing we do before a hike is introductions. That's the normal order. Lecture. Introductions. Hike.... *(pleased)* A poem about me – really?

HARVEY

I was planning to go into the woods alone. I had no idea I'd find three ladies on a bench, well, two on the bench, and one exercising. I also didn't know a ranger was leading a hike, but since I'm here, I'd love to get into the woods as soon as possible. Are introductions necessary?

WALLY

Forest rangers follow a protocol.

HARVEY

I'll go last.

MADELEINE

You're shy.

CLAIRE

This man is anything but shy.

WALLY

Why don't you go first?

CLAIRE

I'm Claire Sanders. I use lip balm. I like red M&M®s, but only red. I can tell the difference with my eyes closed. I like coconut as a food and as a shampoo scent. I shouldn't say this, but I--

BERNADETTE

Then don't!

WALLY

Great, who's next?

MADELEINE

I'm Madeleine Jones. That's not my real first name, but I call myself Madeleine, Maddie for short. I journal and write poetry, and I think Madeleine Jones sounds more literary than my real name, which is Sue Jones. I started writing when I was 13, and I haven't stopped. I like to write in coffee shops and on benches in the woods. I'm looking for a man who collects something – rocks, mustache combs, fountain pens, anything really. Also, I have a cat named Missouri. He's declawed, which wasn't my idea. He's a rescue cat. Also ...

WALLY

Very nice, Madeleine. A cat named Missouri?

MADELEINE

Yes, but I'm not done, Ranger.

WALLY

We're behind schedule.

MADELEINE

Maybe later I can tell you the rest?

WALLY

Maybe. Next...



BERNADETTE

*Bonjour*, fellow hikers. Claire and I are costumers for the opera company.

CLAIRE

Don't talk about me. I already introduced myself.

BERNADETTE

As you can see Claire is *trés* testy. I'm the head costumer, and I brought Claire here for the weekend so we can bond. My name is Bernadette Broussard.

MADELEINE

A beautiful name!

BERNADETTE

Yes, yes it is. I dabble in watercolors when I'm not designing costumes, and I was hoping our hike would inspire my next painting. I'm a very artsy person. I'm French.

WALLY

Thank you, Bernadette. Mr. Orange, you're next.

HARVEY

How did you know my last name? I'm ...uh ... John Orange, and I like Evian. Also, I jog.

WALLY

That's a great introduction. Oh! I just realized we haven't covered cockleburs.

CLAIRE

Cockleburs led to the invention of Velcro®, which costumers use regularly.

HARVEY

My "garment" closes with Velcro®.

CLAIRE

Oooh, let me see.

MADELEINE

Velcro® is an okay word, but cocklebur, that's a splendid word! Cocklebur. Everyone say "cocklebur."

(silence)

WALLY

I'll say it in the hopes that we can move on: Cocklebur.

MADELEINE

I love that word! Cocklebur, cocklebur, cocklebur.

WALLY

Hikers, your socks and pants will soon be covered with cockleburs. Let's begin!

MADELEINE

But first we need your introduction, Ranger.

WALLY

We do?

MADELEINE

Please.

WALLY

Does everyone agree to start on the hike if I introduce myself?

HARVEY  
Yes!

CLAIRE  
Sure!

BERNADETTE

Ow! I just got a charley horse. Ow, ow! I'm heading back to the lodge.

CLAIRE

She gets charley horses all the time. She has Epsom salts and a heating pad in her room. Ignore her, she'll be fine.

WALLY

Do you need any help?

BERNADETTE

*Merci*, but no. However, I'd like to join you on the same hike tomorrow. With Claire.

WALLY

That would be ... ahem, just great. ... Now, is everyone else ready to go into the forest?

(BERNADETTE exits limping and moaning dramatically)

MADELEINE

Don't forget your introduction, Ranger.

(CLAIRE and HARVEY are engrossed with one another, oblivious to all else)

WALLY

Oh, sure. I'm Wally Weldon, and I've been a ranger here since earning my forestry degree.

MADELEINE

I love your name! I love your forest knowledge. May I call you Wally, or do you prefer Ranger?

WALLY

Please call me whatever you wish.

MADELEINE

What are your views on poetry and cats, Ranger Wally?

WALLY

You really want to know ... Maddie?

MADELEINE

I do!

(WALLY and MADELEINE become oblivious to everything except one other)

HARVEY

Claire is a very feminine name.

CLAIRE

John is a very masculine name.

HARVEY

I'm a very masculine man. ... Uh, Claire, Maddie and the Ranger seem unaware of anything but each other. What if we go on?

CLAIRE

Just the two of us? Into the wood? Really?

HARVEY

I'd like to have a private conversation with you. Maybe later, you can show me your epaulets.

CLAIRE

And my Evian. Is that all right, Ranger? (*WALLY is oblivious to CLAIRE and HARVEY.*)

WALLY

I like Ogden Nash.

MADELEINE

I love Ogden Nash!

HARVEY

Claire, let's go.

(CLAIRE and HARVEY exit hand-in-hand)

MADELEINE

And what about cats? Are you okay with cats?

WALLY

I have three cats, each named for a Midwestern state, but unlike you, I don't have a Missouri.

MADELEINE

That is such a coincidence! Do you live here in the woods?

WALLY

In a log cabin. Say, where did the others go?

MADELEINE

Don't worry about them, Ranger Wally. I'd like to meet your cats. Since the hike is called off.

WALLY

Now?

MADELEINE

Why not? I'll read you my journal entry. And you can show me your collection of ... of ... oh, no. Do you have a collection of anything? Please say you do.

WALLY

I do, but I've never told a soul about it.

MADELEINE

I see. I respect that -- though it makes me sad.

WALLY

Don't be sad, I want to tell you about it. I collect those little stickers that the grocery store puts on bananas and apples and pears. When I have enough, I arrange them into a mosaic. My bedroom walls are covered with sticker mosaics. I ... I ... I'll show them to you.

MADELEINE

Oh, Ranger Wally! You're making me swoon!

WALLY

I'll brew tea for you when we get to my cabin. With fresh lemons.

MADELEINE

I love fresh lemons!

WALLY

We are sympatico! Follow me, Maddie dear.

(WALLY and MADDIE exit, hand-in-hand)

(END OF PLAY)