

# THE BETTER BANANA™

by Salwa Meghjee and Samah Meghjee

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**THE BETTER BANANA™***A Comedic One Act***by Salwa Meghjee and Samah Meghjee**

**SYNOPSIS:** Four genius young scientists getting their post-graduate degrees at the University team up to create the world's first superfruit, The Better Banana™, which will revolutionize the way humans think about food and their health. The banana can provide the entire day's nutrients needed, in fun flavors such as chocolate and taco supreme.

At a university party, the four discover that their technology was stolen by a rival research group at the nearby College. They decide they must find a way to retrieve it, reveal the robbers, and clear their own name before The Greater Grapefruit (Patent Pending) is released to the public.

**DURATION:** 25 minutes.

**TIME:** Present day.

**SETTING:** Henry's University Laboratory, University Party / Conference Room, Grapefruit Team's College Laboratory

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(4 females, 4 males, 4-6 either; 0-10 extras)*

HENRY (m)..... A soft-spoken, wise student geneticist that works on The Better Banana. *(60 lines)*

EDGAR (m)..... An eccentric, pompous entrepreneur/chemist that works on The Better Banana. *(84 lines)*

ARLET (f)..... A prideful, logical biochemist that works on The Better Banana. *(38 lines)*

MAGDALENA (f)..... A determined but nervous biologist that works on The Better Banana. *(37 lines)*

PROFESSOR VECTOR (m/f)..... A professor at the students' university. *(3 lines)*

PROFESSOR VESPER (m/f) .....	A professor at the students' university. <i>(3 lines)</i>
DEAN (m/f) .....	A dean that works at the students' university. <i>(6 lines)</i>
ELIZABETH (f).....	A scientist that works on The Greater Grapefruit. Is the counterpart of EDGAR. <i>(10 lines)</i>
ALEXANDER (m) .....	A scientist that works on The Greater Grapefruit. Is the counterpart of ARLET. <i>(21 lines)</i>
HARRIET (f) .....	A scientist that works on The Greater Grapefruit. Is the counterpart of HENRY. <i>(7 lines)</i>
MARKUS (m).....	A scientist that works on The Greater Grapefruit. Is the counterpart of MAGDALENA. <i>(10 lines)</i>
INTERVIEWER (m/f) .....	<i>(1 line)</i>
SECURITY PERSON #1 (m/f).....	<i>(5 lines)</i>
SECURITY PERSON #2 (m/f).....	<i>(7 lines)</i>

### CASTING NOTE

Extras can play University Benefactors and Distinguished Scientists at the press conference/university party. If using a small cast, no extras are needed. PROFESSOR VECTOR can double as SECURITY PERSON #1. PROFESSOR VESPER can double as SECURITY PERSON #2.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The two labs can use the same set and equipment; consider flipping the set around to distinguish their differences. Both labs should include a printer (the “DNA printer”) and at least one microscope, as well as a box of slides and some paper and pens. For the conference, there can be some kind of physical division between each half of the stage that serves as the “television,” and the use of the TV remote clicking in time with the lights going up and down can indicate that the party is watching the press conference. This scene can utilize many extras if needed. The sets can remain extremely simple.

## DIRECTOR’S NOTES

The first performance of this play was during the Oxford College of Emory University’s Annual One Act Play Festival in 2017. We utilized one table and a double-sided sign with “University” on one side and “College” on the other to distinguish the labs from each other. We utilized doubling and no extras. The costumes were simple lab coats and all-black for the Volunteer Security People. The quippy dialogue and gregarious performances of our actors brought the play to life without a set or elaborate props. During the final scene, Henry and Edgar spoke on mics in the tech booth, then came down through the audience to enter the scene. We recommend playing with the entire theater or black box and leaning on your students’ performances—it’s a fun play with room for creative freedom!

## PROPS LIST

- many bananas
- many grapefruits
- a television (optional)
- a TV remote
- a telephone
- lab equipment
- a printer
- a microscope
- a box of microscope slides

**PREMIERE PRODUCTION**

The Better Banana was first produced at the Oxford College of Emory University in Oxford, GA in April 2017. The production was directed by Samah Meghjee as a part of the College's 29<sup>th</sup> Annual One Act Festival, produced by Haley Williams. The original cast was as follows:

EDGAR.....	Quinton Gasper
HENRY.....	Ian Turner
ARLET.....	Erin Oquindo
MAGDALENA.....	Jenna Cariker
MARKUS.....	Esteban Ramos
HARRIET.....	Kay Nilest
ELIZABETH.....	Cynthia Yang
ALEXANDER.....	Andy Paul
PROFESSOR VECTOR /	
VOLUNTEER SECURITY OFFICER #1.....	Ada Li
PROFESSOR VESPER /	
VOLUNTEER SECURITY OFFICER #2.....	Jackie Stewart

**SCENE 1**  
*HENRY'S LAB*

**AT START:** *HENRY sits at a desk, falling asleep. EDGAR enters.*

**EDGAR:** Henry, I've got it!

*HENRY raises his head.*

**HENRY:** Wha?

*EDGAR pulls out a banana.*

**EDGAR:** Our newest invention! Look at this.

**HENRY:** Edgar, bananas already exist.

**EDGAR:** You don't get it. This is genius. It's everything we've been waiting for. It's magnificent. Inspirational. Splendorific! Truly fantastical!

**HENRY:** It's a banana.

**EDGAR:** Exactly.

**HENRY:** You lost me.

**EDGAR:** Look at this color, this shape, the smell, the texture. The opportunities are endless! Think of how much we could do with this banana, Henry!

**HENRY:** You need more sleep.

**EDGAR:** And you need a new perspective. We've been coming at this from the wrong angle.

**HENRY:** How so?

**EDGAR:** We can't start genetically engineering something new from scratch. We've tried that before. Remember the parrots that could only speak in iambic pentameter?

**HENRY:** Hey, without them I never would've passed my English class.

**EDGAR:** We need to start with something we already know, something everybody knows. Something completely normal, utterly unremarkable. And turn it into something—

**HENRY:** Amazing.

**EDGAR:** And you finally arrive on the same page.

**HENRY:** So, what are you planning to do with bananas?

**EDGAR:** Well, I was hoping you would come up with that.

**HENRY:** Banana, banana.... banana bandana.

**EDGAR:** Banana katana. Plantain cane. Yellow fellow.

**HENRY:** How about no rhymes?

**EDGAR:** What makes you disregard this fruit?

**HENRY:** It's boring, it's gross, it's tasteless, it's a terrible color—

**EDGAR:** It's unfashionable! How do we make bananas fashionable?

**HENRY:** I don't know. They're boring and outdated, like Myspace, or organized sport. It's just a banana.

**EDGAR:** And you're just a person. And I'm just an undiscovered genius entrepreneur. And this is just the start of something brilliant, I know it!

**HENRY:** I should've known not to get my hopes up. Yesterday you brought in a coconut.

**EDGAR:** That was stupid. Everyone's already maxed out the coconut. Coconut water craze and all, "Has more potassium than bananas—"

*HENRY and EDGAR look at each other.*

**HENRY and EDGAR:** POTASSIUM.

**HENRY:** Genetically engineered to contain enough potassium for months—

**EDGAR:** We can do better than just potassium.

**HENRY:** You're right! Enough nutrition to keep you alive and well for days in one banana.

**EDGAR:** And better tasting!

**HENRY:** Any flavor you want! Cotton candy, lemon lime, taco supreme—

**EDGAR:** And we can breed a variety of colors, suitable for every fashion choice! It's the advanced banana, the banana of the future, banana 2.0—

**HENRY:** The Better Banana!

**EDGAR:** We're going to need help.

*There is a knock offstage.*

**HENRY:** Ask, and you shall receive.

**EDGAR:** How serendipitous! It's almost like it was staged!

*ARLET and MAGDALENA enter.*

**ARLET:** Hey guys, do you want to go get some lunch?

*EDGAR and HENRY share a look.*

**EDGAR:** Sure! How do you feel about bananas?

**MAGDALENA:** Poorly.

**HENRY:** But how will you feel about them once we've genetically engineered them?

**ARLET:** Still poorly. Can't we get Indian instead?

**MAGDALENA:** What are you two getting at?

**EDGAR:** Henry and I have been orchestrating a grand plan. What if we could make better tasting bananas? Flavored to taste like anything you can imagine and stocked full of potassium and protein and anything else your body needs. It's brilliant, I know; no need to thank me.

**MAGDALENA:** It's stupid.

**ARLET:** You guys have had a lot of bad ideas, but this might be the worst one.

**EDGAR:** I was quite attached to this one, too.

**HENRY:** I think it's pretty good.

**MAGDALENA:** It's impossible.

**HENRY:** No, it's not. It's basic biology.

**ARLET:** Bananas do not taste like tacos.

**EDGAR:** But they *could*.

**ARLET:** Bananas will *never* taste like tacos.

**HENRY:** But they *should*.

**EDGAR:** They will if you *believe* it.

**MAGDALENA:** I just don't know if this is a feasible idea. The cost, the time needed, the resources, it's all a lot. You know bananas don't even have seeds? We couldn't even grow our own bananas.

**HENRY:** Dwarf bananas do. We could buy some off eBay.

**ARLET:** I thought the idea was to make a *better* banana.

**HENRY:** Well, look at this.

*HENRY sits down at the desk and pulls a sheet of paper towards him. He begins to write.*

**HENRY:** This is the chemical composition of a banana. If we go into its DNA and recode some components—*small* components, Magdalena, don't have a heart attack—we can change small aspects, like taste and color. We'll be able to artificially help the process along with breeding. Breed together sweeter bananas, alter genomes, and voila, The Better Banana, Trademark. Add a few symbols into the genome that are harmless but show that it's our copyright, and the whole world will have a superfruit and know that we created it.

**ARLET:** Okay, I concede. That's actually kind of brilliant.

**EDGAR:** I came up with it.

**HENRY:** Yes, you were very helpful. Are you two in?

**ARLET:** Yeah, let's do it. What do you say, Magdalena?

**MAGDALENA:** Oh, all right. As long as it doesn't interrupt my thesis. And we make a chocolate one.

## SCENE 2

### UNIVERSITY PARTY/PRESS CONFERENCE

**AT START:** *The stage is split. On one side, a party is in progress. The other side is dark, but a podium is set up. It's the day before The Better Banana™ is to be released to the public. ARLET, MAGDALENA, HENRY, and EDGAR are at the party celebrating the Banana's imminent release. All the University's benefactors are in attendance, as well as highly regarded scientists and professors. There is a television playing softly in the background.*

**PROFESSOR VECTOR:** Great work, you four. What an accomplishment.

**EDGAR:** Oh yes, it was a year's worth of grueling work, but when you put four brilliant heads together nothing can really stand in our way.

**ARLET:** Humility is a virtue, Edgar.

**PROFESSOR VESPER:** Not today, it's not. If I were you, I'd be proclaiming my achievements from the heavens.

**HENRY:** That's for the press release tomorrow, Professor Vesper.

Then the whole world will get to see The Better Banana—

**MAGDALENA:** And we'll be rich!

**ARLET:** Until I pay my college loans back.

*DEAN turns away from the news and beckons EDGAR over.*

**DEAN:** Um, Edgar, you may want to see this...

*EDGAR walks over to the television. ALL on stage stop to pay attention. Lights go up SL to reveal a press conference with ELIZABETH, HARRIET, MARKUS, and ALEXANDER, behind the podium. The party members turn to face SL, becoming the audience of the press conference.*

**ELIZABETH:** ...the product of our hard work and dedication over the past six months. We now present, The Greater Grapefruit!

*There is tumultuous applause from SL. HENRY drops his glass.*

**MARKUS:** The Greater Grapefruit is the world's first true superfood. It has enough nutrients to nourish a person for up to five days and is far more delicious than any other fruit. It comes in several flavors, including cotton candy, lemon lime, taco supreme, and yes, chocolate.

**EDGAR:** Hey!

**MARKUS:** You can purchase it in a variety of colors, to match any style. It is officially available in stores across the nation tomorrow.

Seeds to plant your own will be available within the next year.

**PROFESSOR VESPER:** Bananas don't have seeds.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is it true you hold the patent on superfruit?

**HARRIET:** It's patent pending, yes.

**EDGAR:** Aha! Pending!

*DEAN and PROFESSOR VESPER and PROFESSOR VECTOR shake their heads at EDGAR.*

**MARKUS:** We've worked long and hard these past few months, and we're delighted to be the first scientists ever to create—

*MAGDALENA switches off the television. SL goes dark once again.*

**PROFESSOR VECTOR:** This is very bad news.

**ARLET:** It's the same concept, but The Better Banana is—

**DEAN:** Let me guess—better?

**EDGAR:** Same concept; indeed, they've obviously stolen our technology!

**DEAN:** This doesn't look good.

**HENRY:** You can't honestly think—

**DEAN:** That you've stolen this technology? I can't see what else to think.

**MAGDALENA:** We've been working far longer—

**PROFESSOR VESPER:** And you finally resorted to plagiarism. This is terrible.

**DEAN:** You have shamed this University. We are pulling out of the project. Consider your credits revoked, and yourselves expelled.

**PROFESSOR VECTOR:** How could any scientist ever do this?

**ARLET:** We didn't—

**DEAN:** Enough. We're done here. Take your bananas and go.

### SCENE 3

#### HENRY'S LAB

*AT START: ARLET, MAGDALENA, HENRY, and EDGAR are all in HENRY'S lab. ARLET is on the telephone while the others discuss the situation.*

**EDGAR:** Who were those people?

**ARLET:** President Godfrey, please listen to me. They stole our bananas—

**MAGDALENA:** They're from City College. I saw them at the Entrepreneurship in Science Conference I went to last summer. They were presenting their new invention, powdered muscle strengthener.

**HENRY:** Wasn't someone from the University working on their thesis on using muscle strengtheners a few years ago? What a coincidence.

**ARLET:** What do you mean by "I'm bananas?" What does that even mean?

**MAGDALENA:** Just like The Greater Grapefruit coincidence.

**ARLET:** Please sir... you can't pull our funding. All you have to do is look at their data. We can prove they stole the technology from us. It's really very easy, sir. We have a trademark—yes, we have a trademark on a banana—you have to listen to us; the evidence is in their lab—(*Pulls the phone away from her ear.*) He hung up on me!

**EDGAR:** Now what do we do?

**MAGDALENA:** What is there to do? We've been removed from the department. They're expelling us. We have to pack up our stuff and go home and try to scrape the last bits of our lives together.

**HENRY:** Come on, Magdalena, don't say that.

**ARLET:** We can still prove them wrong. We can buy one of the grapefruits and take it to the department to prove it ourselves.

**MAGDALENA:** Those Grapefruit goons will have removed our copyright symbols from the genetic code.

**HENRY:** Maybe, but it'll still be in their original samples.

**EDGAR:** I taste the sweet flavor of a solution!

**HENRY:** Whatever samples they stole from us will still be in their labs.

**MAGDALENA:** And how do you suggest we get them? It's not like we can just walk in and take them.

**EDGAR:** Why not? If we get evidence that they have the samples, we can prove they stole our technology.

**ARLET:** And prove that we broke into their lab.

**EDGAR:** That's only a minor infraction, according to the school's bylaws.

**MAGDALENA:** We're already in so much trouble—

**EDGAR:** Right. So, what's a minor infraction on top of expulsion? Think of the bananas, Maggie. If not for yourself. Do it for the bananas.

**ARLET:** Thievery is not the most rational course of action.

**EDGAR:** It could be.

**MAGDALENA:** What if we get caught? Then we lose our technology.  
And our degrees!

**HENRY:** We just have to be careful. It's not *stealing*, per se. It's more,  
borrowing from a public institution of learning. We're allowed to  
borrow things from public institutions.

**MAGDALENA:** This isn't checking out a book from the library, Henry.

**HENRY:** All we have to do is get into their lab. It'll be simple.

**ARLET:** Yes, because organized crime is so easy.

**EDGAR:** I could do without your sarcasm, Arlet.

**ARLET:** I could do without your stupid plans. I knew bananas were a  
rotten fruit. Look where they got us.

**EDGAR:** I'd say they were pretty appealing.

**HENRY:** Arguing won't fix anything. This could really work. All we need  
to do is go into their lab, look for grapefruit samples with our  
copyright on them, make a copy and take some pictures, and then  
leave. Two of us can keep watch. It's not impossible. We're genius  
scientists. We can pull off a little heist.

**MAGDALENA:** Isn't this dangerous?

**EDGAR:** What's life without a little danger? I'm telling you, this would  
be even more fun if there were assassins involved.

**MAGDALENA:** No assassins, please.

**EDGAR:** You take the fun out of everything.

**HENRY:** If you have any better ideas, speak up now or forever hold  
your peace.

**ARLET:** You know, I never liked grapefruits. They're oranges that are  
trying too hard.

**EDGAR:** Is that a yes I hear?

**MAGDALENA:** I don't know...

**EDGAR:** I'm taking it as a yes! I'll get the ski masks!

**SCENE 4***THE GREATER GRAPEFRUIT (PATENT PENDING.) FACILITIES*

**AT START:** *The stage is dimly lit. The set is a high-tech lab. There are soft beeping sounds. ALEXANDER is asleep on a cot behind a piece of machinery SR, visible to the audience. In the booth of the theater (or elsewhere on stage or in the audience.) sit HENRY and EDGAR, communicating remotely with ARLET and MAGDALENA. If there is no place in the theater that is visible to the audience, their voices can simply be heard offstage, with radio static to indicate that they are not present. ARLET and MAGDALENA enter, and the lights go up.*

**ARLET:** Edgar? Henry? Can you hear us?

*Lights up in the booth.*

**HENRY:** Loud and clear.

**MAGDALENA:** This is a bad idea.

**EDGAR:** I told you I should have come with you.

**ARLET:** The goal is to avoid getting caught, Edgar.

**HENRY:** Focus. You have twenty minutes to do your thing and get out before the security guard rotates back around. We disabled the alarms remotely, but this operation is kind of a dead giveaway because, you know, now all the lights are on.

**ARLET:** I didn't know a biologist could be so tech savvy.

**HENRY:** It's a hobby.

**MAGDALENA:** It's a crime—oh my God.

**HENRY:** What? What's going on? I don't see anyone on the security cameras.

*MAGDALENA and ARLET speak in hushed tones, having noticed ALEXANDER asleep on the cot.*

**MAGDALENA:** There's someone here.

**HENRY:** In the lab?

**ARLET:** One of the Greater Grapefruit gorillas. He's sleeping.

**EDGAR:** So tiptoe!

**MAGDALENA:** We've got to get out of here.

**EDGAR:** We don't get another chance! You must press on, as swift as a coursing river, with all the force of a great typhoon—

**ARLET:** This is no time to quote Mulan!

**EDGAR:** It's a great movie!

**HENRY:** He's an idiot, but he's right: it is a great movie. And we don't get another chance to prove we were robbed, so just try not to wake him up.

**MAGDALENA:** I hate you all.

**EDGAR:** You'll love us once we've sued the pants off the Greater Grapefruit goblins' backs and are millionaires.

**ARLET:** I found it! I found slides labeled "The Better Banana Samples," and more labeled "The Greater Grapefruit Drafts".

**HENRY:** Find a microscope and look at them.

*ARLET puts the slides under a microscope and studies them for a moment.*

**EDGAR:** Magdalena, can you look through the cabinets? Maybe there's more evidence in them.

**MAGDALENA:** I guess...

**EDGAR:** That's the spirit! Reluctant agreement!

**ARLET:** It's exactly what we thought. It's our tech. You can see the partially erased copyright in the DNA of the draft. Instead of saying, "Edgar is an astoundingly handsome gentleman," it says, "Edgar is an as—"

**EDGAR:** Okay, that's quite enough. Hurry up and make a copy and go.

**MAGDALENA:** Can't we just take the slides?

**HENRY:** It'll look like we fabricated it. You've got to make a copy, so we can present it to the police. They'll be able to come back here and verify it with the original.

**EDGAR:** They must have a DNA printer in their lab.

**ARLET:** I found it! I'll turn it on—

*The machine beeps very loudly. MAGDALENA drops to a crouch on the floor, covering her head with her hands. ALEXANDER snorts.*

**EDGAR:** Make that thing shut up!

**HENRY:** Don't turn it off! Just make the copy!

**MAGDALENA:** This is my nightmare; this is my nightmare—

**ARLET:** Thirty seconds.

**MAGDALENA:** I think this guy's waking up.

**HENRY:** You've got to hurry, then.

**ARLET:** I can't speed up time, Henry!

**EDGAR:** You could at least try, Arlet. Where's your spirit?

**HENRY:** Edgar, you must go distract that guy.

**EDGAR:** I'm coming to the rescue!

*EDGAR leaves the booth and exits the theater.*

**ARLET:** I have to copy the second one.

**MAGDALENA:** There's no time! He's about to wake up—

**ALEXANDER:** What— thieves! Robbers!

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