

Four for Cheese

A dizzy exposition in one act.

Frank Lehner

Cast of Characters

TWO COUPLES

Plaff: A strapping round-faced man in his mid-thirties.

Cliebe: Plaff's wife, confidante, and playful arch enemy.

Freng: A staunch republican-looking democrat.

Shelta: Freng's gal. She's sexy, bright, and wholesomely wanton.

Prologue

The play begins in the foyer before the performance itself. It's here the audience should be contained. There are tables filled with crackers and aromatic cheeses (Bleu, Gorgonzola, Roquefort, Limburger). The room should overflow with these often delicious, often nauseating smells. The cheese must always be fresh and edible.

In fact, cast and crew wander through (rubbing shoulders with the audience), eating cheese and crackers. They make off-handed comments about the "unrealized wonders of cheese," "the interrelation between cheese and the cosmos," and "how cheese can oft be said to be *the* urban fruit, as well as best friend to man and pet."

The foyer can be dressed as seen fit; however, the more *cheesy* the artifacts that can fill the space the better. For instance: Photos of cows' and goats' udders. Hanging cheeses through which the audience must negotiate before entering the theater. A video from the Cheese Association of America. The foyer is lit overly bright.

The doorway leading to the theater is restricted so only one spectator can enter at a time. The seating should be staggered. That is, it should take a few seconds for one spectator to enter before the next. The theater is utterly dark; the entering spectator should be blinded by darkness. This period of disorientation will give seating attendants time to randomly shuffle each spectator to his or her seat. Groups and couples must be broken up. As each spectator is assigned a seat, the attendant whispers words of wisdom into his or her ear. For instance:

- Blessed be the cheese makers, for theirs is the kingdom of the palate.
- From dirt we came, cheese we'll enjoy, to dirt we shall return.
- Soon you'll see untold wonders of the human spirit.
- Churn, churn, churn, this life we often just burn, burn, burn.
- Golf isn't merely for white men.
- Never forsake the udder. It's the teat that made our teeth and bones strong.
- You'll see speckles of your life flash before you in twenty minutes.
- All work and no cheese make you a shallow boy/gal.
- You'll soon wonder how you're able to maintain your daily balance.
- Share cheese with others as others have shared cheese with you.
- Why don't you admit it? Come from the closet; you're a turophile, admit it!
- Cheese, wine, garlic—the holy Trinity!
- The god-awful truth is we're alone here, no matter how much TV we consume.

Remember, it's very important for groups and couples to be separated. Once inside the theater, each spectator is alone. No hand-holding. No reliance on the familiar. No watching the facial expressions of a domineering companion for help on how one should feel or react.

As the theater is filled, the background should overflow with a clamorous roar of daily people noises: A baby's shrill cry. A man giving his wife some jibe line about how much he loves her. Someone yelling to someone in a passing car. A priest speaking Latin. A vendor hawking tube socks. The President saying something inane. Someone conducting business over the telephone. Someone being over-opinionated in line waiting for a film. An advertisement for a local plumber....

The set comprises two rooms. The main area is a kitchen. Stage center there is a window directly above a sink and counter. There are two small doors beneath the sink; it's a storage area. To the right of the window is a cabinet. To the right of the cabinet stands a refrigerator. Stage left there is an obtusely angled opaque partition/wall that points stage left. Behind this wall all offstage activities take place. The wall is constructed so the audience can see the silhouettes of cast members when they are in this room.

When the seating is completed, the house lights blare for a few brief seconds. The audience sees the set and our four characters. They are spaced across the stage. They perform symbolic acts. For instance, one might be on a toilet, another might act if he/she is hung on a cross. Another might have his/her mouth stuffed with food, and the other might dance with a mannequin. Then the lights darken, leaving the audience's eyes burning with an afterimage.

The Play

A door slams; lights up:

Plaff: *(To Cliebe sitting at a table licking a piece of fruit.)* Whoa, baby. Fifteen years and I'm eligible for the Senior's tour. *(he mimics a golf swing.)* What's say I stay home and golf, and you just keep going to work? I golf and cook diner, and when I'm fifty, I hit the tour, then we're both rich, and on TV to boot.

Cliebe: You moron. You golf about as well as my butt chews gum. I need a man, not some pie-headed pea-brain who thinks he's going to be important someday. *(Almost chanting, licking the fruit more intensely with each phrase.)* I need a man. I need man. I need a *real* man.

Lights down:

In the darkness we hear Shelta rummaging through the audience. She mildly accosts people, opening purses, jackets; grabbing a crotch or two; touching a breast. While she does this she espouses comments that cut to the person's soul. However, her real motivation is that she's in search of cheese.

Shelta: 'You got some cheese? How about you, Pretty; 'got some cheese in there. I need a piece of cheese. I have the crackers; give me some of that cheese, Sweet Face....

Lights up, half:

The spectators find Shelta in the first row. She's biting a spectator's neck; she grinds on another's leg. Continually, she asks for cheese. Then she finds someone whom she really likes, becomes even more friendly, and ecstatically recites...

Shelta: Asiago. Parmesan. Romano. Sapsago. Spalen. Cheddar. Caciocavvallo. Swiss. Ementaler. Gruyère. Brick. Münster. Limburger, Port du Salute, Trappist, Roquefort, Gorgonzola, Blue, Stilton. Wensleydale. Bel Paese. Brie. Camembert. Cooked. Hand. Neufchâtel. Cottage. Pot. Bakers'. Mysot. Primost. Ricotta.

When finished, she takes a piece of cheese from her pocket and feeds it to her spectator friend.

Spot on Shelta: she's possessed.

You think me a fool. Ha!
Well, it's *you* who are apt not to see
there's this overt, direct, unmistakable correlation
between us and the wonderful world of cheese!

It starts a milky liquid, I'll have you know—
Much like your daddy, daddy; O bless his soul.
Contain its little heat and churn it away,
it thickens and grows and has its day.

When waxed and ready to be sold,
it's contained; like me, my deliciousness untold.
Let it swing from a shelf, but once you awaken it from its
cold you're obliged to enjoy it, God, O God, before it
molds.

Lights up, full:

We see Freng's silhouette in the shower; his back is toward the audience. He's singing a Freng song. Mostly about himself and the importance of penis. This song can be changed as seen fit. It's more fun if it's sung to a popular tune of the day.

Freng: I'm Freng. I'm Freng.
And it's Freng's friend
that makes all them girlies sing, sing, sing.

He cups his penis and testicles in his hands.

You're my pal, big guy.

He pets his penis, then turns the water off; there's no towel.

Ennghh!!

This moan is a familiar code to Shelta.

Shelta: What! What do you want?!

She walks to a closet and grabs a towel.

Freng: (*Neanderthalish.*) Ennghh! Ennghh! Freng • need • towel. Help!

She opens the door and throws the towel at him.

Shelta: Here. Now, shut up! I'm listening to the coming rain.

Freng oblivious catches the towel and immediately dries his penis. He's delighted with himself.

Freng: Freng's friend might catch a cold.

Shelta: Freng's friend, like Freng, heap big be-hind! (*Changing tone.*) It's like living in a kindergarten around here.

Shelta opens a cupboard above the sink, removes, then opens a bottle of red wine. She pours a glass, then pulls a wheel of cheese from the refrigerator. Eating a piece of cheese, she gazes out the window above the sink as she baits a rat trap. She places the trap beneath the sink. Freng enters with the towel wrapped around his waist.

Freng: (*Hugging her from behind.*) What do you think's going to happen when they begin using bovine blood for human transfusions?

Shelta: As dumb as you are, I don't think it'd matter.

Freng: Another thing that's been bothering me is—I can never remember what animals are good to eat? 'The ones with the cloven hooves, or the ones with the cloven hooves and that chew the cud? Or is it, chew the cud and don't have cloven hooves? 'You know where that's at in the bible?

Shelta: What *is* it that's wrong with you?

Freng & Shelta: (*Together mockingly.*) Too much TV radiation as a child.

Freng: Tell me Shelta, what *is* it that binds us together?

Shelta: Like the squirrel to a nut.

Freng: Like Jesus to the cross.

Shelta: Like garlic to the Italian.

Freng: Sometimes I feel dead-frozen like the souls of Pompeii.

Shelta: How thinly can a drop of oil spread over a vast sea?

Freng: We breathe each other's air in bed at night.

Shelta: Everything beyond the gloss of your eyes is a fantasy constructed from missing parts of my life.

Freng: So, it's like the archaeologist who might infer what Venus' arms were like after spending ten years in front of a wavy mirror?

Shelta: You'll never imagine anything truly alien.

Freng: O my poor white mouse-trained self.

Shelta: Freng's friend can't counterbalance the fear Freng feels at dusk when the windows blaze golden.

Freng: But what of my palm print? I roll over you the way the rain colors a monument.

Shelta: Even the stone retrieved from the sea's floor remains dry inside.

Freng: Does a ghost swagger?

Shelta: If it does, most people miss it. There's little that can be done; a pepper plant can't grow a tomato.

We hear the rat trap snap.

Freng: (*Excited.*) Did it get to the cheese?

Shelta removes the trap from beneath the sink. A huge rat hangs from the trap. Unconcerned with the beast, she and Freng inspect the trap to see how much cheese the rat ate before being killed.

Shelta: (*Animated*) Oouuaa, look! I'd say it had just the teeniest of tastes and was just getting ready to sit back on its big cute paws and savor this delicious Brie, when out of nowhere—whapp-o, life's suddenly different.

Shelta removes the cheese from the trap and eats it. She snickers at the rat, removes it from the trap by the tail, then casually flings the carcass out of the window.

Shelta:(*Boldly.*) I simply will stand *no-body* pinching *my* cheese.

Freng: (*Understandingly confused.*) But you put it there; you bated him.

Shelta goes to the refrigerator and gets another wheel of cheese. She rebaits the trap, then places it beneath the sink.

What's happened? You used to be so free with your cheese.

Shelta:(*Almost snapping.*) You used to kiss me more than you do now. Do you ever think about that?

Freng: I'm working so regularly now. Where's the energy best spent? Who would keep you in cheese?

Shelta:(*Arrogant and snippy.*) Hey, there are rodents all over this city I can catch. Plenty of people'd be happy to buy me a wheel of cheese that would be just for me.

Freng: Is there no end to your retreat?

Shelta: Is spaced curved? If you wait long enough everything comes back. It's your choice.

A giant head from a parade float passes, filling the whole of the window for a few moments.

I thought these trivial rituals had finally faded.

The sound of firecrackers is heard.

Who's kidding whom? (*To Freng.*) I barely know you, let alone stand curbside next to a neighbor, wondering if there will be a time when we'll know each other's names. Not in my lifetime, that's for sure.

She cuts another piece of cheese and pops it into her mouth.

Freng: It looks like I should just put on my clothes, (*Mimicking her outline.*) curved space or not.

Shelta: You can clothe yourself or you can open a beer. Sure signs of free will. *(Pause.)*

Freng leaves to clothe himself. Another head from the parade fills the window. The face peers eerily into the kitchen.

I'm so alone.

She reaches out and caresses the face.

Do you have any cheese I can have, sweet fellow? Have you come to tease me? So big and strong and full of yourself. Have you come to impress me? Are you snagged out there? Are you replete? Have you followed the waft of my Fontina? Do you see how soft I am? Might we swim together for a while? How long does the sheen remain on a new floor? Why are you ogling me? Everything is fake. Everything is so empty inside. I've never found one who loves *all* the cheeses. Which cheeses do you love? Can I feel safe with you? Will you take Asiago for granted, or will it be smoked Gouda that does you in, sweet fellow? Chin up. No use putting the horse before the spilled milk. Yet the predictions are always so predictable.

Sound of the rat trap snapping. Shelta shudders.

Lights down:

Lights up:

Plaff is putting golf balls toward an electric putting cup. He is fastidious in his approach. Checking his grip and stance, etc. He putts a few balls with a modicum of success.

Plaff: *(To himself.)* What am I supposed to do, huh? There's only so much shoptalk that can hold a man's interest. How much beer can I drink? There, I go to work. Here, I come home. I understand that life supposed to be cyclical, but I don't think that's what Confucius, or whoever the hell said that, had in mind. Beside when I'm on the links, it's just me and this little pea. *(He holds up a golf ball.)* I get to see birds and trees. God knows how removed we are from nature. *(Pause.)* No one has any faith. I wonder if they've ever done a study that shows that this *worker thing* is in the genes? I mean, have I been predestined to be a grunt all my life? *(Playing.)* Doc, what do the tests say? *(Changing*

voice; he a doctor He raises the golf ball in front of his left eye.) Well, Plaff, I have good *and* bad news. The good news is, you're more lucky than most. The results show that you'll probably rise to head supervisor, and that you have the propensity to show enough initiative to make another twenty-percent on the side. (*Changing tone; switching the ball to the other eye.*) The bad news: you have the intelligence to know that there's a teeny bit more to life that somehow you're not quite grasping. So there you have it; a mixed blessing. One other thing. You do have some entrepreneurial blood in you somewhere, but it's *really* watered down. Probably an illegitimate pregnancy in the late Eighteen-hundreds. Enjoy. My assistant will send you the bill. (*Short pause. Back to his voice.*) Man, I have to do something. This is ridiculous.

Enter Cliebe carrying a brown shopping bag. It's filled with cheeses.

Cliebe: You mean you *have* something to do. Listen, Johnny Pensive, get this junk the hell out of here. The house is not a putt-putt golf course.

Plaff: Babe, on a scale of one to ten, how smart do you think I am?

Cliebe: (She's heard this before.) 'You been trying to read Scientific American again?

Plaff: Come on, be serious.

Cliebe: Four and a half.

Plaff: Come on. Serious, Babe.

Cliebe: Four and *one*-half.

Plaff: You never give me any credit.

Cliebe: It's up from four the last time you asked me this inane question.

Plaff: What, 'cause I read two books since then?

Cliebe: It's a start, Albert. Take the TV out and I'll immediately raise it to a five.

Plaff: (*Shocked.*) No! TV friend.

Cliebe: Two steps forward, three steps back.

Plaff: How do expect me to get my golf tips?

Cliebe twirls her index finger in a circle, meaning for Plaff to clean up his golfing paraphernalia.

Cliebe: You know, if you got rid of that TV, you might not be so inclined to jabber while we're trying to make love.

Plaff: Hey, I happen to think it's very intriguing to wonder whether Pocahontas enjoyed the feel of buckskin on her breasts.

Cliebe: Ask her the next time you see her. Moron. You know, men are enough to make women gay.

Plaff: (*Feigning excitement.*) Now you're talking, Babe.

Cliebe: When you're done cleaning this junk up, how about putting that cheese away.

Plaff: You'll think more of me when everyone's clapping, and some tournament director's handing me a check for two-hundred thousand dollars.

Cliebe: Yeah, I'll also be fifty-five years old. So, I'm not holding my breath.

Plaff: (*Playing.*) You sure are one dream-busting bitch, 'you know that?

Cliebe: And with mumbo-jumbo you spout, you should have been a weatherman or a city-level politician.

Plaff walks over and begins to unload the shopping bag. He notices the inordinate amount of cheese.

Plaff: My God. (*Animated.*) What, you took pity on a lost Amish cheese merchant? It's appreciate-a-cow week? (*Short pause.*) Cliebe, there's enough cheese here to ruin the cholesterol of everyone within a twenty-mile radius.

Cliebe: Dermatologists have observed that people would rather put iodine on a wound than use a soothing unguent, something which is actually a better healing agent.

Plaff: And you're going to prove that people would really rather stick a battered finger into a fondue pot?

Plaff cuts a piece of cheese and pops it into his mouth.

Cliebe: (*Perplexed.*) Where do we learn? Where did we get this idea that if something hurts it must magically be good for you? You know, there's this chorus that starts to chant about the evils of decadence the minute you begin to think about doing anything that's the least bit self-indulgent. You only get two-weeks vacation, because you're *supposed* to be working, being productive. We're lucky to have jobs, right? Keep that nose to the grindstone; something good will become of your life. What? I have to buy my own iodine?

Plaff: (*Trying to bring her back.*) Yoo-hoo, Cliebe. Have a piece of cheese. And this (*To the stack of cheese.*), is your way of thumbing your nose at the invisible name-taking chorus of non-decadence: Buying enough cheese to raise the standard of living of every soul in Wisconsin?

Cliebe: (*Matter of factly.*) It's white people. (*Short Pause.*) There are too many white people. If there weren't so many white people, the world wouldn't be the mess it is. Think about it, who ruined everything? White men. White men with "small pee-pee" syndrome. (*Changing the tone of her voice; half singing.*) My penis is small, (*Acting as if she's using a machete to cut through the thickets.*) but we're taking over everything. Get out of our way or die a grisly, horrible, blasphemous death. (*She makes some grunting male-marching noises.*) We're white, and, besides, God is on our side. (*Short pause.*) You all should be castrated at birth! It would be for the best, don't you think?

Plaff: Why did you buy all this cheese?

Cliebe: I don't know. I thought it important. I have a feeling that cheese is good for cleansing the soul. I feel a door about to open. I had a premonition. I know my life is about to change. Something in the delicacy, something in the brashness. I smell a beacon. I see the bacon. In the near distance, the path will become clear. (*Short pause.*) For heaven's sake, I sound like a store-bought greeting card. Don't you feel restrained? Don't you feel encumbered? Don't you feel kind of stupid most of the time? Our daily column is really a very sad who, what, where, when, and how! Now, I have an icon in which to believe. Some

may throw the I Ching; I will investigate the self-directed prophecies hidden in the sliced and grated.

Plaff: (*Playing.*) So you really did hurt your head when I shut it in the car door last week, eh? Cliebe, *what* are you talking about?

Cliebe: (*Snapping.*) I'm talking about lollygagging and indifference. I'm talking about us! I'm talking about the fruitlessness of faith. Boy, you wouldn't know your finger if it bit off your face, would you? I'm talking about the inability to remain thrilled. I'm talking about unfulfillment. I'm talking about yearning. I'm talking about doing something that's good for *my* soul for a change. I'm talking about the shallowness of love. I'm talking about misdirection. I'm talking about the two different languages we speak. I'm talking about being a human being who stands proudly on her own two feet. I'm talking about ripping the shadows away.

Plaff leans back against the sink and makes a face like he's being bombarded with torrent of gamma rays. Cliebe does not take kindly to his unending playfulness. In response, she pretends that she blows him away with a couple of blasts from some gigantic handgun, then continues.

I'm talking about the stupid laissez-faire wastefulness of our direction. I'm talking about plodding. I'm talking about everything being a joke. I'm talking about our never-ending, day-at-a-time, parallel-line relationship. Do you know what I mean?

Plaff: Well, I certainly can see why you bought so much cheese. Maybe an exorcism would be more effective? What the *hell* are you talking about? What? White men ruined the world and your life, and mostly all that's my fault, right?

Cliebe: Yes!

Plaff: OK, sorry. (*Short pause.*) What do you want to do tonight?

Cliebe: Maybe a film. But first, I want to understand the fear of diversity.

Plaff: Look, I can't help it that I'm white. It's embarrassing, I know. Are there crackers to go with this cheese?

He cuts a piece of cheese, lofts it into the air, and catches it in his mouth.

Do you think the world, life, and aspiration are any different for me? Huh? (*Intently.*) Look, you do what you do, until you don't want to do it anymore, and then you don't. It's as simple as that. Why's everything always have to be so danged *deep*? (*He hugs Cliebe. As he does he rolls the golf ball on her head.*)

*Enter Freng. He's dressed. He's invisible to Cliebe and Plaff. Even though all four are on the stage at once, the **only thing common in their two worlds is cheese.***

Cliebe and Plaff go about their daily activities. Plaff heads to put the cheese away. Cliebe stares pensively out the window.

Freng walks to the sink, inspects the rat trap, and lifts the trap and the dead rodent by its tail.

Freng: (*To the rat, tenderly.*) Sorry, buddy. The quest for others' perfection often causes the dumbly innocent to fall. (*He balances the rat and trap on his left shoulder. His head gently caresses the rat like a violinist holding a violin in position.*) It's the proportions we rationalize. I don't understand our stupid hierarchies, I just play dutifully along. When *I* ask the questions that might soothe me, I am rebuked. Fallen comrade. Taker of the unbeknownst bait. Poor recipient, whacked with the convenient righteousness of eminent domain, I must dispose of you and get on. (*He removes the rat from the trap and discards it out of the window. He takes the cheese from the trap, eats it, then rebaits the trap.*)

Shelta: I dreamt I was skipping. It was before I understood the cheese. I was in a man's hand. Held high and safe. It was as if his... Did I hear the trap go? Is that what woke me? I'm on guard. Perpetually.

Freng: No, my Holy. I think a rubbish can happened to fall on one of the politicians lingering after the parade.

Shelta: Ah, the parade. (*She runs to the window, stands next to Cliebe, and peers around.*) As I expected....

Freng: Please. You *do* expect, don't you?

Plaff: The cheese is away! Do you mind if I putt some before we do whatever it is you feel is best for us to do. The diversity of films

available to a coupla' white people is tremendous. That's for your information, in case you wanted to know.

He begins to set up his putting gear again.

Freng: (*Walking to the refrigerator.*) Shall I make you happy my love?

Shelta: Yes. A razor-thin sliver of Lombardo.

Cliebe: Would you have to wear those god-awful checkered pants? Those mint-green sweaters?

Plaff: Not in bed, unless of course you were desirous of such.

Shelta: When you go out every day, I'm constantly amazed that you return. Is it easy to find your way back?

Cliebe: You would be happy *though*, wouldn't you?

Freng: Where else would *I* go?

Feeding her the sliver of cheese.

shelta: Where I chase you to, I suppose.

Cliebe: Too bad! (*She'd been leading him on.*) That's too long to wait. I've thought it over for the last time. No! Ha! Ha! In fact, you're out of your mind.

Plaff ignoring her, hunches over a putt.

Plaff: Shhhhh!

Shelta: Do you think other couples are distressed?

Freng: *They* must be, don't you think? *We* have it all; what's left for them?

Plaff sinks a putt. He cheers himself. Runs about mimicking someone he's probably seen on TV. He stops.

Plaff: Hey, Cliebe. Do we have any cheese? I'm kind of hungry.

Shelta: I'm afraid we miss the big picture more often than not. Yet with the cheese as a guide, I'm not certain how. I hate feelings. They're so debilitating.

Cliebe: Do they kill trees to make golf courses?

Plaff: No.

Shelta walks over to inspect the rat trap.

Shelta: Birds have dialects. (*Short pause.*) This means they hear the soul of their songs differently. (*Trying to make a connection.*) Are there dialects of love? The same drive, but different expressions? Might this account for the confusion?

She picks up the empty trap, rubs her forefinger over the cheese, then places the trap back in position. She licks her finger.

Freng: Should we consult the cheese. The last time the mood struck, you asked for answers from Riola.

Plaff: (*Feigning sexuality.*) Hey, Hot Cakes. Have I ever shown you my putter?

Freng takes a wheel of cheese from the refrigerator.

Cliebe: Yes. (*Pause, half laughing.*) You're a moron.

Plaff: (*Big pout.*) I prefer idiot! (*Changing tone.*) Cut me a piece of cheese will you? I'm feeling a bit punk. (*Pause.*)

Freng walks over to Shelta. He pulls her close to him. He places the wheel of cheese between them. He holds her in a tight dance position. They begin a dance to their own music. Their eyes are closed. After a few seconds they're in a trance. Looking blissful, they amble about the stage.

Do you think other people have as much fun as we do?

Cliebe: I'd find it unbelievable if they didn't. (*She laughs, getting loud and nutty.*) Life's just too much fun! What did I do to ever deserve this state of grace? Look world, look. Look at this man.

Plaff puffs his chest up, regally.

Life is so delicious. Break out the cheese! Come here Mr. Bumblepumpkin. God, sweet God. We require so little. We long so deeply. We manage to mistake frosted windows for depression. The worst we have to do is eat tuna between pay periods. The shackles wrapped about our ankles have very long chains; we hardly notice them. Unless, of course, we're really looking for them. I want a man. I need a man. Ha! It's not a man I want. I don't know what to do with him. I'm like giving a five-hundred-dollar bottle of champagne to a soul weaned on beer.

Plaff continues taking joy in himself.

I'm too concerned with me. I'm understandably misunderstanding what's driving me. I mean, how many advertisements have I seen?

Cliebe & Plaff: *(As if on cue.)* Too much TV radiation as children.

Plaff puts the putter in his pants. He performs his own self-indulgent pseudo-sexual dance.

Cliebe: We're cultivated to be distant. Grown like a hybrid tomato, blossoming quickly, gaining sufficient weight and color, yet our insides remain pulpy, our skins without taste. Show without function. You see, this is why the cheese is so important. *(Pause.)*

The rat trap snaps. Freng and Shelta snap from the bliss of their dance. Freng balances the wheel of cheese on his head. Shelta places her arm in his and they walk with great dignity toward to sink to investigate the kill.

Real cheese that is. Cheese that makes you want to rearrange your roots. Cheese that makes you understand that the culture we should be indebted to is not in the grand museums and libraries. No! Our culture makes the milk, cheese. *(Playing, slapping her forehead. She's just had a revelation)* Cheese-Us, Plaff! Plaff, Cheese-Us. Don't you see? *(Deliberately, so he'll understand.)* Cheese-Us, Mary and Joseph. I'll bet we've been misunderstanding it for two-thousand years. It has to be. Cheese-Us. *(Laughs.)* It makes so much sense. Cheese. Cheese is the perfect reenactment of the heart of the resurrection. My God. It even comes in wheels; reminiscent of the cave stone. It *has* to be! *(Skipping, stopping, cutting a piece of cheese.)* Thank you for *(Eating the cheese, mouth full.)* your only forgotten son.

Plaff makes the sign of the cross. Shaking his head, he's both amused and unsure of what he's just heard.

Freng and Shelta finally arrive at the sink. Freng bends down and retrieves the trap and its fresh capture. He hands the trap to Shelta. Freng places the cheese wheel against his chest. Shelta rests the trap and rat ritualistically atop the cheese between them. They wrap arms and again begin their silent dance.

Cliebe cuts a piece of cheese and walks toward Plaff. Plaff drops to one knee and sticks out his tongue. Cliebe places the cheese on his tongue. She's giving him communion.

The body of Cheese-Us the Savor. Reborn in many forms so we might understand the multifarious deliciousness. Remain in awe. Learn from the textures and aromas, my son.

Plaff: Is this a date we should remember? One of the small anniversaries that must be scrawled into a date book?

Cliebe: Preferably it will become an integral part of our ever-evolving dogma. One of the semi-conscious days that become, for a reason never to be known, ominously important to one party or the other. A date that if forgotten sends you immediately to the cold, wet dog house of sin. There's reverence in remembering the minutia we're plagued with. Otherwise, why would we flog ourselves so unmercifully?

Plaff: I see. It's cross-minutiation then that build the cathedral of Us?

Cliebe: Affirmative. That's an insight that's pushing you ever closer to that big, brain-scale "Five-O" you seek so desperately .

Plaff: (*Wanting to talk smut.*) Talk more. Talk more about your new affinity. Remember me? I'm one forgotten son. Is there cream cheese in the fridge? Let's cut right to the quick of this cheese-spirituality thing. Maybe I could even rub a little lox on you while we're at it. Who knows what we could pull up from the dead. (*Feigning chills.*) Cliebe, I tingle.

Cliebe: OK.

Plaff: (*Stunned.*) Really!?! (*Looking skyward.*) Thank you, Cheese-Us. Big Cheese, ol' buddy, put this day in *your* book of miracles.

Plaff and Cliebe run off giddy.

Plaff: (*Off stage.*) What were you saying about flogging ourselves?

Plaff and Cliebe head off into a room in which their silhouettes can be seen. They go through a series of contorted gyrations in their attempted love making. Occasionally, we hear Cliebe shushing Plaff (He's jabbering again). While they're at it, Plaff and Cliebe roll wheels of cheese over each other. They toss snippets of cheese to each other trying to catch them in their mouths. Cliebe occasionally makes comments about the cheese that Plaff rubs on her body. These acts should be erotic, yet bizarre and specifically individual.

Shelta: (*Continuing the dance.*) How was it that we became able to interact so effectively? How is that our souls mate so well?

Freng: You provided me with a list of mandated verbiage and behaviors that I dutifully had to observe. At first I resisted, remember? Then I discovered that your whims, when met, served my interests very well indeed. Now we amble about as one. I certainly am indebted, most of the time, to your continued vision and leadership. Shucks, Babe, I'd wouldn't even appreciate cheese if it wasn't for your nails-on-chalkboard demeanor. By the way, is the cheese speaking, my Holy?

Shelta: (*Referring to the rat.*) Aren't his eyes beautiful, Pet?

Freng tucks his chin into his chest and looks at the cooling beast.

Is my attraction so powerful? How long before I crumble? The weight of my expectations is unmatched. Sweet creature, your demise leads me somewhere. I shan't forget you. Your oblong speckle of light-brown fur above the left eye, so debonair. Forgive me; you'll be missed at home. Yet my command collects relics. I am listening, attentively. I sleep with one ear open. If the trap snapped and no one heard, how would I know it snapped at all? Do you understand? My emptiness knows no bounds. I'm sorry. I'm not *taking*; believe me, I'm *searching*. My tenderness can be opened as easily as a mussel engulfed by steam. I lay my bait, the respondents who reply, unfortunately, are over eager, misguided, shallow, weak, contemptuous, brutish—always in some manner inappropriate. Yet what rocks me are the innocent who call and fall. I can't make those what they are not. What else can I do? I am plopped here. The circles have already radiated beyond my reach. Who will commandeer my life, if not I?

Freng: When then will you cease baiting the trap?

Shelta: When the cheese is gone and trap's not sprung, of course.

Freng: Had you known this before? Has the cheese spoken?

Shelta: I think we know it all. The answers need only have the impetus to well to the surface. (*To the rat.*) Dear martyr, I know now when I may cease. Thank you.

Freng and Shelta move apart. Freng holds the wheel of cheese before him. Shelta places the trap and rat in the center of the cheese. Shelta moves behind Freng. They turn and again march ritualistically to the window. Shelta then moves from behind Freng and removes the rat from the trap. She licks the rat along his belly, then sets the rat back atop the cheese wheel. She eats the remaining cheese from the trap.

Good-bye, my most gentle of teachers.

Freng tilts the cheese, the rat slides from its pedestal out of the window into the beyond. Shelta blows a kiss in the direction of the departing rodent.

Freng: May I have some attention now?

Shelta pulls a piece of cheese from her pocket and feeds it to Freng.

Shelta: (*Matter of factly.*) My love, I have given you nothing but.

Solemnly, Freng turns and walks off stage. Shelta returns to the sink area, rebaits the trap, places it in position, then gazes out of the window.

Where have you gone? Are you coming back? Have you tasted Serra da Estrella? I am tired. You are lonely. Who? How? Tick, tock; he didn't stop to talk, I'm in shock. Yes, my shoes are polished. I wear my dress. I have something nice to push up my breasts. Listen. Is it coming? Help. Who sees me? To the bone?

She checks the trap. It's as she left it.

He has not come. I have some cheese, do you?

She starts to throw pieces of cheese out of the window.

Do not discard me. Have some cheese. Look, my hair's combed. My eyes, you can see; the soul's grown. Please sweet boy, don't leave me alone. (*Becoming increasingly more frantic.*) I want to tell them how they've tortured me. Look at my chin held up, sharp, like a pin. Hold me. Hold me. Hold me, not like it's a sin. Yes. I do. I will. I know. I believe. Who will come? You'll know it when. Don't worry. There's plenty of time. All things to those who wait. You have no choice but to wait. Who are you? Why do you call on me? What do you want? My cheese? Why? Boy meets girl. Boy meets girl. Boy meets girl. Look, I think my rouge makes me look nice. Don't fight. What's right? I'll leave the light on for you tonight. Here's my cheese. My cheese. My cheese. Don't bite!

She moves out into the audience. She begins to beg participants (of both genders) for answers.

(*To a male.*) Do you like your wife? Do you really? Do you think *only* of her when you're hugging in the bed? Or is it that you only think of her when you're in bed?!

(*To a female.*) If I kissed you, would our mothers wish us dead? Let me touch you. I'll say I'm just picking off a thread.

(*To a male, cupping her breasts.*) How 'bout you, Bucco, is this the kind of thing you want? (*Grinding her breasts on the side of his face.*) Sweetness rubbed right through your head?

(*To a male in reference to the female spectator sitting next to him.*) Haven't you wondered who this woman is? If you might not have a happier life with her instead?

(*To a female.*) Were you trained to look for the biggest, sweetest, strongest puppy you could blind? (*Feeding her a piece of cheese.*) How were you able to signal him? What's your sign? Tell me some of yours and I'll tell you some of mine.

(*To a male.*) Are you him? I want you to be him. I want you. I want you. I want you. Be him.

(*To a female.*) My God, how many days can *he* (*Pointing to some mystery mate.*) be seen in a row? Is that, do you think, just a tad stifling to how you might grow?

(To a male.) Was a guy like you meant to be monogamous? Or would you sometimes just rather be a man•among•us? *(Feeding him some cheese.)* Take some cheese; I can see you like it.

(To a female.) It's their world girl. Does that diamond ring sting?

(To a male.) Do you listen when *your* baby talks? Or do you put on the gloss eyes, and huff, sigh, and cajole? How is it any little discussion beyond the ball scores tears out your precious, self-centered little soul? *(She feeds him a piece of cheese.)*

Shelta returns to the stage. The audience-questioning has whipped her into a frenzy. She's out of breath.

The door opens. The door closes. Each day we venture out with the hope of tomorrow as the pay. *(She runs to inspect the rat trap; it's still cocked.)* He's not come. *(She pulls up her blouse, exposing her stomach.)* What to do when this turns to flub? That's the time when they'll be looking for young blood. *(Drops blouse. Short pause.)* Sweet cheese, what have you done to me?

Enter Plaff. He's a happy, post-coital guy, wearing pants and an undershirt. Shelta sits in front of the sink.

Plaff: *(Stepping over Shelta, yelling out of the window.)* World! You have to love being alive. You got cheese *and* you got guys like me. *(Turning from window.)* Man, O man, O man. I feel better, now. *(He cups his genitals.)* Plaff's partner is a happy guy, too. A happy guy is a happy guy. It's so easy to make a guy happy. Let 'im have a little golf. Let 'im watch a little TV. Give him some of the sweetness kind of frequently. It doesn't even have to be every day. He'll take out the garbage. Take the stuck lids off jars. Walk along the curb. He'll figure out things. He'll cut the turkey. He'll discipline the dog. *(To Cliebe, off stage, candy-coated.)* Honey Muffin. How about some cheese and bread and tomato? *(To himself.)* What's that called? *(Short pause.)* Sandwich. *(To Cliebe.)* A sandwich. Do you want a sandwich?

There's no answer from Cliebe. Plaff steps over Shelta and walks to the refrigerator and begins making sandwiches. Shelta remains seated on the floor.

A man likes to eat. *(Eats a piece of cheese. Mimics putting.)* You know this cheese is pretty good. *(To Cliebe.)* Good cheese.

Shelta: He's coming. I know he's coming.

Plaff: (*To Cliebe.*) Are you coming?

Shelta: I've been waiting. I've not neglected my duties. I've been trying to think as often as possible. I try to help Freng.

Plaff: Cliebe, this cheese is making me feel strong and potent.

Shelta: He wouldn't know about cheese if it wasn't for me. I don't think he really understands.

Plaff: In fact, why don't you stay there. I be right back!

Shelta: For too long I've been an afterthought. For shame.

Plaff: Will we still be able to enjoy vegetables and other non-dairy products, my love?

Shelta: Too long. If I don't watch the snare, who will?

Plaff: I won't be long, my blintz.

Shelta: They might take my breath, if I allow them.

Cliebe enters. She also is kind of post-coital nonchalant.

Plaff: Go back. I thought we could crumb the bed.

Cliebe: Clubhead! Not so much mayonnaise.

Plaff grabs Cliebe in a cartoon manner; he's proud of his lovemaking.

Plaff: Am I a monster or what?

Cliebe: Or what.

Playfully, Cliebe breaks loose from Plaff and inspects the sandwiches.

Shelta: Always looking ahead. Glorifying what's gone by.

Shelta opens the door and inspects the trap.

Cliebe: Halfbake! You can't mix Romano with Colby. Five steps forward, six steps back. Get out of the way. I'll show you how a sandwich is made. First of all, never ever, never ever, never ever use store-bought balloon bread. (*She holds up a pathetic piece of white bread then throws it out of the window.*)

Plaff: I thought...

Cliebe: (*Interrupting*) That's right, you thought. Remember how dangerous I told you that could be?

Plaff puts on a big pout face and begins to shuffle around the room.

Go ahead. Let pain roll over you. Doubt yourself some more. Go ahead. It feels like your soul has been wrenched from your body with a pair of pliers, doesn't it. That's OK. The learning process is never easy. If I don't teach, who will?

Plaff finally sits on the floor next to Shelta.

Plaff: Will I ever be human?

Cliebe: Probably not. Yet I view it as but another challenge.

Plaff: Wouldn't you say that you see it as an opportunity?

Cliebe: No. I think challenge is the correct term.

Plaff: Well, Miss Benevolent, are you going to make those sandwiches or are you going to diatribe about the endless universe hidden within the female bodice?

Cliebe: (*Mocking Plaff in fun.*) Cheese, bread, tomato. What's that called? (*She slaps her palm to her forehead.*) Oh, yeah. Sandwich!

Plaff makes kissing noises at her. Cliebe strides to him and feeds him a piece of cheese. Heads back and begins making sandwiches.

Shelta: How can I reconcile the fact that I attract and reject simultaneously?

Plaff: Girls, girls, girls.

Plaff gets up walks over to Cliebe and grinds her gently from behind. He then finds his putter and begins practicing.

Cliebe: *(To Plaff.)* It's amazing that you didn't mix the Limburger with the fresh Mozzarella!

Shelta: Shame on you for telling me how beautiful I am. Well, if I'm not going to be beautiful, who is? If I don't seek, who will venture forth? If I don't ask, who will answer? I refuse to sit here, wondering if my life is all it should be. It may or may not be, but at least I'm aware of the seconds ticking by. I'm aware that the mold on the cheese doesn't necessarily ruin the wonderment inside. Plodding isn't necessarily bad. He'll come. He'll come. He'll come. He'll come. And all my striving shall have been fortuitous pre-work. *(She opens the door beneath the sink, inspects the trap again, then closes the door.)* When the cheese is gone and the trap's not sprung, no one shall be more aged than I.

It becomes obvious that Cliebe is making a gigantic sandwich. Layer upon layer of cheese and bread. Shelta arises as if she's been renewed. Plaff sinks an imaginary long putt. He kisses the putter then dances with it. Calliope music is heard. Shelta runs to the window.

He's come back! I knew he would. No one forsakes me. Nothing is out of bounds. Help me if you don't believe. My sweetness has been known to stop them in mid-bite. *(Music coming nearer.)* He probably couldn't sleep. He probably had to know. Right? He probably went to every deli. He probably tried many, many types of cheese. He probably thinks he can cut the grade. He probably thinks he can beat the predictions. Yes, I'm here. I'm here. I'm here. I'm here. I'm here. Come near. Come near. *(Music right outside window.)* My heart is open. My guard is down. Tell me it's true. I've been waiting for you. Don't defeat me. He loves my waft. Like no other. I've all the cheese he'll ever need. Speak to me. *(The music begins to recede.)* Don't miss your chance. Aroma. Aroma. Aroma. Aroma. Cheese is better than romance. *(The music fades in the distance.)* Entrance *(noun)*. Entrance *(verb)*. *(She checks the rat trap. The cheese is still there and the trap is still cocked.)* No deterrent. *(To herself)* Come along, now. Time is all we have. I'm churning. Unrelenting, I shall succeed.

Enter Freng. In one arm he's carrying a bag overflowing with cheese-related trinkets (a rubber cow, a poster of succulent cheeses, a gourmet cheese cutter, a crystal

cheese server. A book entitled, Cheese and the Metaphysics of Decency, etc.). In the other hand he holds a large bouquet of flowers.

Freng: Glorious, ravishing, super-consuming eminence. I've had a snippet of time to consider and reconsider your grandeur. My emotions oft times preclude clear thinking. I beckon to you. Your giftedness prods me to be more ravenous than a man ought allowed to be. Yes, occasionally, I want more than I can be. Please pardon. Please forgive. My problem is me. See, I am beseeching.

He holds out the flowers as a peace offering.

I realize my fingers shall probably never live long enough to lift the cheese. My efforts, surely rancorous to the more effete. Blessed, I live between two worlds. The egg shells you so carefully place frighten me, yet I tiptoe as well as I can. In your shadow, I can only feel the destruction underfoot. I generate my small tricks to remember the virtues you prescribe. Listen!! *Jarlsberg* is Trustworthy. *Ricotta*, Loyal. *Romano*, Helpful. *Gouda*, Courteous. *Colby*, Kind. *Parmesan*, Obedient. *Havrati*, Cheerful. *Munster*, Thrifty. *Gorgonzola*, Brave. *Provolone*, Clean. *Fontina*, Reverent.

He begins to remove the items from the bag.

I bow before the cheese. I attempt to make *It* a living part of our lives. Yes, I am now whining, I know. Yea, though I walk through the valley consumed by shadows, not fully understanding the cheese, I fear only for you. What more can a male do? (*Changing tone.*) Nice serving tray, eh?

Cliebe has finished her gigantic sandwich (three- to four-feet high).

Cliebe: (*Proclaiming.*) A sandwich, by a woman, for the world! Behold its glory! Stunning! Ravishing! Be-uu-tee-ful!!! (*To Plaff who's putting away.*) This, Mr. Pinhead, is what I believe you were trying to construct.

Plaff: Look, Ma, the Sandwich of Babble.

Shelta: Don't you realize that things can only take you so far? It's got to come (*Pointing to her heart.*) from within here.

Plaff: How can I be like you?

Freng sets the bag down. He's dejected. He walks over to the sink area, finds a vase in which he places the flowers, then sets the vase on the windowsill.

Shelta: You're downright dumb sometimes.

Cliebe: You'll never be like me. Or is it, you'll never like me?

Shelta: I'm alone. I'm watching the trap. I'm waiting.

Plaff: Let's eat some of that masterpiece.

Shelta inspects the trap again.

Cliebe tries to figure a method for cutting the sandwich.

Freng walks back to the bag and picks it up. He walks to the window and begins pitching the contents, one by one, out of the window.

Shelta: Destroying them will not destroy the act.

Cliebe is befuddled by the sandwich.

Cleibe: Plaff, I don't know how....

Plaff: Of course you don't.

Shelta: I need a piece.

Freng stops, sets down what he was going to throw, walks to the refrigerator and tears a chunk of cheese off one of the wheels. He then takes it begrudgingly to Shelta.

Shelta: Pessimism must never be allowed to enter our vocabulary.

Freng feeds her the piece of cheese.

Lights down.

The End