

Plays for Young Audiences

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The Old Man Who Loved Cheese

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From the Story by
Garrison Keillor

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Lights up on NEIGHBORS, outside the house of WALLACE P. FLYNN.

NEIGHBORS: There was an old man named Wallace P. Flynn
 Who lived in a house in the trees.
 You could smell him for several miles downwind
 Because of his fondness for cheese.

WALLACE, in his kitchen, with wheels, wedges and vats of cheese; slicing, dicing, dipping and spreading, preparing the family meal.

WALLACE: Cheese!

NEIGHBORS: Cheese, that's what he ate.

WALLACE: Cheese. The only dish on my plate. Cheese!

NEIGHBORS: Cheese, in wedges and wheels.

WALLACE: Cheese served up for all my meals.
 Cheese for breakfast,
 Cheese for brunch,
 Cheese for a snack and then
 Cheese for lunch.
 Cheese!
 Nothin' to eat but cheese!
 No food can compete with cheese!
 Just cheese!
 Cheese and only cheese,
 I'm talkin' cheese,
 Cheese,
 Cheese,
 Cheeeeeeeese--- !

NEIGHBORS: But ...

WALLACE begins carrying various dishes into the dining room.

NEIGHBORS: The cheese that was dear to WP, was not the kind like Brie.

WALLACE: [pauses; turns] Brie?

NEIGHBORS: The cheese of polite society.

WALLACE: Bah!

NEIGHBORS: He liked ...

Goes back to his food, laying the cheese dishes about the table.

WALLACE: Norwegian cheese!

NEIGHBORS: That was in your face.

WALLACE: Danish blue!

NEIGHBORS: That really stank up the place.

WALLACE: Gorgonzola!

NEIGHBORS: That knocked ya back a pace, that smelled like socks from a marathon race!

WALLACE holds a dish up to his nose and breaths in the fumes.

WALLACE: Ahhh ...

NEIGHBORS: Pew!

WALLACE: Heavenly, Delightful!

NEIGHBORS: Yeah? Says who?

WALLACE: The scent, the bouquet, the aroma, the bloom.

NEIGHBORS: Yikes!

WALLACE: So invigorating. So exhilarating. Such fragrant perfume!

NEIGHBORS: Yuk!

WALLACE admires his cheese, lovingly.

WALLACE: "You are the promised kiss of springtime, That makes the lonely winter seem---" [*Turns; calls his FAMILY*] Dinner's ready!

NEIGHBORS: Stinky. Smelly.. .

WALLACE: Ambrosial jelly.

NEIGHBORS: Cheese!

WALLACE: Cheese!

Wife LOUISE, son WALLACE JR., and DAUGHTER enter the dining room.

FAMILY: What are we havin'? ... Or need we ask?

WALLACE lifts the lid of one particularly big platter of food. Fumes roll out and across the table. The FAMILY gasps as they get a whiff of the smelly entree.

FAMILY: Whew!

WALLACE: Camembert casserole.

JUNIOR: Aw Dad!

WALLACE, continues around the table.

WALLACE: Limburger and beans.

LOUISE: Wallace.. . please!

WALLACE: Blue cheese lasagna.

DAUGHTER: Leftovers?

WALLACE: Roquefort sardines.

JR & DAUGHTER: Not again.

WALLACE: A coleslaw of Colby.

LOUISE: Wallace don't do this.

WALLACE: Pont Le Vec pralines.

JR & DAUGHTER: Come on, Give us a break.

WALLACE: Neufchatel noodles, Schmierkase strudels, Liverot and onion -----

A commotion erupts in the Family; JUNIOR and DAUGHTER pleading with their mother to confront WALLACE about the horrible cuisine. LOUISE turns to WALLACE.

LOUISE: Wallace I'm askin' you,
Beggin' ya please:
For the sake of the family,
Change your cheese!
You've gone too far,
We've had enough,
The stink,
The stench is just too much.

JUNIOR: Cheese makes your breath smell so bad;
It's kinda like death to be near ya Dad.

DAUGHTER: I don't see what's the sense if, all ya eat is cheese that's offensive.

WALLACE: Cheese cheers me up when I'm blue,
Cheddar makes me feel a whole lot better,
Camembert does too,
It's true.
And the scent of Emmentaler
Makes me grin and jump and holler
And oh the pleasure
Of a slice of Cheshire!

WALLACE sits down. The resigned FA MIL Y joins WALLACE in bowing their heads over the cheese.

WALLACE & FAMILY: What a friend we have in Cheesus.

WALLACE: Some men want fame and their name on marquees. Some love money, I choose cheese!

DAUGHTER rises from table, grabs a suitcase and heads for the door.

DAUGHTER: Well I'm movin' to Oklahoma ... To escape the aroma.

DAUGHTER exits. JUNIOR follows suit, reaching for his knapsack as he leaves.

JUNIOR: And me, I'm off to Arkansas ... Where they've got a halitosis law.

JUNIOR exits. LOUISE reaches for her purse and pulls out a travel voucher.

LOUISE: And I've a ticket for an island cruise
I was hoping I'd never have to use.
But if instead of your family,
You choose cheese,
Then I'm sailing off to the Hebrides,
Where an ocean breeze blows night and day
And drives unpleasant smells away.
[Heads to front door; turns back to her husband.]
Good bye Wallace!

LOUISE exits, slamming door behind her.

WALLACE: Louise??! *[WALLACE goes to door, looks out.]* Junior? Princess? ...
Anybody?

No response. WALLACE stands there for a minute, then turns, slowly closing the door behind him. Reenters the dining room; pulls out a chair and sits down at the table. WALLACE sighs, his head drooping sadly. He catches the scent of cheese, looks up and notices all the uneaten platters of food on the table.

WALLACE: Hmmm... *[Reaches out; picks at a bit of cheese off one of the plates. Eats the cheese, smacking his lips; swallows very loudly.]* Yum. *[Eats some more. Swallows again with a big gulp. His spirits pick up, the cheese working its magic on his mood. Continues eating in earnest.]*
La la la la la
La la la la la

Liverot and onion rings!
[Beginning to lose his self-discipline.]
Cheese tostadas,
Cheese frittatas

Outside the house. The fumes from all the mounting food in WALLACE's house drift outside and across his front yard.

NEIGHBORS: Pew!

WALLACE, meanwhile, continues to gorge himself on all his favorites.

WALLACE: Double stuffed cheese enchiladas!
Cheese chop suey

NEIGHBORS: That smell!

WALLACE: Extra gooey.
Stewed pots of cheese ratatouille!

NEIGHBORS: Yuk!

WALLACE: Cheese sashimi,
Kinda creamy,
Washed down with a cheese martini!

NEIGHBORS: Oh no!

The strength of the cheese turns WALLACE's hair white.

WALLACE: Cheese croquettes,

NEIGHBOR: Children –

WALLACE: En Brochette

NEIGHBOR: Stay away from there!

WALLACE: Salads of cheese with cheese vinaigrette! Cheese soufflés,

NEIGHBORS: Gross!

WALLACE: Cheese parfaits

NEIGHBORS: Watch out!

WALLACE: Cheese marinated with cheese mayonnaise! A bowl 'a cheese granola

NEIGHBORS: Yikes!

WALLACE: Yellow cheese jello with cheese marshmallow.
A flask 'a cheese Alaska!

NEIGHBORS: The neighborhood!

WALLACE: Cheese tetrauni!

NEIGHBORS: What's happening here?

WALLACE: Cheese scallopini!

NEIGHBORS: Oooo! Hold your nose!

WALLACE: Cheese cakes,
And cheese pies,
And cheese steaks,
And cheese fries,
Casseroles,
And fricassees,
And barbecued rotisseries,
And yes,
Rest assured,
My three favorite words:
Fried cheese----

NEIGHBORS: Duck for cover! [*NEIGHBORS hide*]

WALLACE: [*WALLACE belches.*] Fried cheese curds!

No. 2: Easy Eds

NEIGHBORS peek out from their hiding places.

NEIGHBORS: Well I guess his cheese supplies ran out... [WALLACE, in his kitchen, opens the cupboards.] And Wallace P. Flynn couldn't do without, [WALLACE searches for more cheese.] So he drove his truck to town and parked it
At the rear of Easy Ed's Used Cheese Market.

WALLACE hops in his truck and roars off for EASY ED's. He screeches to a stop out back of the store; gets out of his truck; goes inside. EASY ED, behind the counter, looks up.

EASY ED: Wallace!
How are ya?
What can I help ya with?
What d'ya fancy?

WALLACE: *[looking around]* Well I...

EASY ED: What strikes your mood?
A wheel of Camembert?

WALLACE: No...

EASY ED: A slice of Jarlsberg?

WALLACE: I...

EASY ED: A creamy Havarti
Or a Port Salud?

WALLACE: Not for me Ed.

EASY ED: No?

WALLACE: Not today.

EASY ED: Oh.

WALLACE: Today I'm lookin' for somethin' especially gourmet.
Ya see,
I'm on my own now and eatin' what I please,
And I've developed a bit of a craving for really ... fragrant cheese.

EASY ED: Oh... I get ya. [*Winks knowingly.*]

WALLACE: Have anything?

EASY ED: I might have somethin' for a customer like you.
Are ya serious?

WALLACE: I'm serious!

EASY ED: 'Cause this cheese is serious.
It's not for amateurs makin' their cheese debut.
I'm talkin' 'bout cheese,
Cheese,
With a with a bit of a zip to it!

WALLACE: Cheese,
Cheese,
With a savory smell!

EASY ED: Yes,
Cheese,

WALLACE: Cheese,

EASY ED: Cheese,

WALLACE: Cheese,

BOTH: With a pretty good kick to it!

WALLACE: Somethin' with a rare and exciting perfume

BOTH: That lights up the air with the bite of its bloom!

WALLACE: Yes!

EASY ED reaches behind the counter and pulls out a ring of keys.

EASY ED: Follow me...

WALLACE: Where are we going?

EASY ED: You'll see. [*Unlocks a door and leads WALLACE down some stairs.*]
Down in the basement I've a special room
Where I keep the cheese in an underground tomb.
It's gotta be cool but not too cold
Cause this particular cheese is 20 years old.
[*Opens a creaky door to a room in the basement, brushing away the cobwebs. Points at the cheese tomb.*]
Look---
Here it is!

EASY ED slides back the lid, opening the tomb. A greenish, gaseous glow leaks through the darkness. Vapors rise. WALLACE gets his first scent of the cheese.

WALLACE: Ooooo.

EASY ED: Take a whiff.

WALLACE: Ah!

EASY ED: Like what ya smell?

WALLACE: Mmmm

EASY ED: Is this what ya wanted?

WALLACE: How much will ya sell?

EASY ED: As much as ya like [*EASY ED hands WALLACE a burlap bag.*]
Here--- Help yourself!

WALLACE shovels cheese in the bag.

EASY ED: Now when ya get home with that burlap sack

Dig a hole in your yard out back.
Cover it up,
Put in a pipe,

WALLACE: To smell the cheese when the cheese gets ripe!

EASY ED: Yes! And when it begins to gurgle and squish

BOTH: And bubble and burble and smell like ...

NEIGHBORS: *[Outside, whispering, aside] ... dead fish!*

WALLACE lifts the stuffed bag to his nose, inhaling deeply.

WALLACE: Mmmmm. It's gonna be ...

BOTH: My kind of heaven!

WALLACE: . . . Delicious!

No. 3: THE SIEGE

WALLACE heads back home, burying the cheese in his yard, as per instructions. Then, outside WALLACE'S house.

NEIGHBORS: Wallace P Flynn drove his load of cheese

BOY ON BIKE: *[swerving at the smell]* Ahhhh!

NEIGHBOR: Look out!

NEIGHBORS: Back to his smelly house in the trees

Cheese fumes waft through the neighborhood.

NEIGHBOR: Hold your nose

BOY ON BIKE: *[abandoning bike]* I can't breathe.

NEIGHBORS: Whew!
The smell was so awful,
So sour and vile,
The skunks said:

SKUNKS: We need to lie down for a while!

NEIGHBORS: One day,

NEIGHBOR: Pew!

NEIGHBOR: A pig on its haunches
Took one sniff... *[PIG sniffs, snow]*
Then fell down, *[PIG collapses]*
Unconscious.

MAILMAN: I can't deliver the mail
It smells too rank!
Can't even get close
Without an oxygen tank!

NEWSBOY: *[waving newspaper in the air]* Extra! Extra!

MAN ON STREET: What headlines are these?

NEWSBOY: *[showing headlines]* "Despite Neighbor's Pleas,
Flynn Still Chomps Cheese"

*Commotion among the NEIGHBORS as the CHEESE POLICE advance on WALLACE's house.
In the back yard, WALLACE digs up the ripened, smelly cheese and takes back into his house.*

POLICE: We are the Cheese Police!
We are the Cheese Police!
With our cheese proof masks and cheese proof suits
And rubberized steel-toed anti-cheese boots
More expensive than pair of Guccis
And strong enough to keep out blue cheese.
We are the Cheese Police!
We are the Cheese Police!

More commotion among the NEIGHBORS. The POLICE CAPTAIN aims his megaphone at WALLACE's front door.

POLICE CAPTAIN: Hey Flynn,
Throw down your cheese
Put your hands in the air ...

POLICE: And freeze! [*Pause. No response. POLICE move in a little closer.*]

POLICE CAPTAIN: Put your hands in the air ...

POLICE: And freeze! [*Pause. Still nothing. Move a little closer still.*]

POLICE CAPTAIN: Your hands ...
In the air ...
And.. .

They hear the sound of WALLACE's front door locking. Inside the house.

WALLACE: That's better.
There's such a fuss about in the neighborhood these days.
Well,
I've got some time;
I'm not gonna waste it
[*Holds up the burlap bag of cheese.*]
My cheese is ripe,
I can't wait to taste it!

In formation, moving cautiously towards WALLACE's front door.

POLICE CAPTAIN: Mr. Flynn,
We're asking you again.
Either you come out or---

POLICE: We come in!

Dancing about the house with his burlap bag of cheese, giddy with anticipation.

WALLACE: Green cheese!
Glops and blobs and dribbles of green cheese

With yellow lumps!
Green cheese
With squiggles of mold through it
That's what I'm hoping my cheese will be;
Forget that sissy stuff like brie
Now,
Let's see.. .

WALLACE opens the burlap bag and pulls out the ripened cheese. Steamy vapors curl up through the air, engulfing the house and seeping out its windows, chimney, etc.

Outside, the POLICE begin to choke. Tears run down the CAPTAIN's face. The cheese fumes are too strong for the POLICE and they gasp for breath.

POLICE CAPTAIN: [blowing whistle, calling out] Halt! Retreat!
Turn around, Head back to the street!

The CAPTAIN grabs a tree to steady himself, looking quite ill. His face turns pale, tremors shaking his great physique. The POLICE pull back from WALLACE'S house, standing around the CAPTAIN in loose formation, ALL rapidly respiring.

POLICE: [gasping] We can't go in,
Can't make it through
Now what Captain?
What'll we do?

POLICE CAPTAIN: I... I... [After a beat, the CAPTAIN regains his composure and barks out the orders.] Well don't just stand there completely flustered---
Load your guns with the butterscotch custard!

NEIGHBORS gasp. POLICE fetch their cannons and artillery. WALLACE delights in his cheese.

WALLACE: [eating] Yum yum yum yum yum yum yum yum!

Outside: POLICE load their weapons.

POLICE CAPTAIN: Ready.. .

WALLACE: [smacking his lips in tango rhythm] Mmmmm! Mmmmm!

POLICE Creeping forward, artillery loaded.

POLICE CAPTAIN: Set ...

WALLACE: Yum yum yum

POLICE CAPTAIN: Aim ...

WALLACE: Yum yum! Yum yum!

POLICE CAPTAIN: And ...

WALLACE: Yum yum yum yum, etc.

POLICE CAPTAIN: Fire!

Bombardment of the house. The first round of butterscotch shoots out of the cannons and lands on WALLACE's rooftop, drizzling down the eaves of the house. POLICE scramble to reload, then fire again. Streams of butterscotch shower the house. POLICE reload and fire again. The sugary goop slides down WALLACE'S chimney, covering the windows and doors. More shots, more butterscotch. Then... the front door opens.

POLICE: Wait, Look---

POLICE CAPTAIN: Hold your fire men, No more! [A white flag pokes out the door of WALLACE's house.] I think he might be comin' out the door! [The POLICE and NEIGHBORS wait anxiously.]

WALLACE: Hey---
See my flag?
The smell of butterscotch,
It makes me gag!

WALLACE stumbles out of the house to the front lawn. The POLICE rush in, surrounding him. NEIGHBORS cheer.