

THE NEW DEATH

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

CHEESE	He is the embodiment of Cheese, currently interviewing for Death's job.
EDGAR	A poor fellow who had the recent misfortune of dying.
BRUUNHILDE	The angel who is evaluating Cheese for the job.

SETTING

Edgar's bedroom.

TIME

Anytime.

SCENE

(Edgar is sleeping in his bed. Cheese, with a long staff, is watching him sleep for a time, waiting for him to “wake up”, but he doesn’t. After a while, Cheese gets impatient, and starts making little sounds, which become louder sounds, and eventually he kicks the bed a bit. Then more. Finally, he uses the staff to push him out of bed, at which point he startles awake, facing away from Cheese. He can’t figure out what is going on, and finally turns to see Cheese, which startles him even more severely. In the background is Bruunhilde, who remains in said background, observing.)

EDGAR

Wha-- Who the hell are you? *(Cheese says nothing.)* Who are you!?! What are you doing here?!

CHEESE

(Ritualistically...)

It is *time*, Edgar Hodgekiss.

EDGAR

What? What are you doing in my house? How did you get in here?

CHEESE

(Same tone)

It... is... time.

EDGAR

Time? Time for what? Time to call the police? Time to buy a gun? Who are you!?!

CHEESE

It is *your* time. Time to pass to the next world.

EDGAR

Are you threatening me? What the hell is going on!?

CHEESE

You have died, Edgar Hodgekiss, and I am here to escort you to the Underworld!

EDGAR

What!!?

CHEESE

Died. Dead. Gone. You've kicked it. Time to move on.

EDGAR

Move on...

CHEESE

Shuffle off this mortal coil and all that. Come on. Get up. Let's go.

EDGAR

You're kidding me.

CHEESE

'Fraid not. Come on, let's move. We haven't got all day.

EDGAR

I'm... dead?

CHEESE

Like a doorknob. Let's go.

EDGAR

I'm not dead. (*Cheese just looks at him.*) I'm not! I didn't die!

CHEESE

Yes you did. Just a few moments ago. Heart stopped. It's a bummer, but what are you going to do? Let's go.

EDGAR

And you...

CHEESE

Yep. Here to escort you to the Underworld. Let's go.

EDGAR

You... you're... Death.

CHEESE

Uhh... sure. Let's go now.

EDGAR

Sure? Sure?! Are you or aren't you Death?!

CHEESE

For all practical purposes, yes. I'm Death. Let's go.

EDGAR

For all practical... You're not Death. Who are you?

CHEESE

I'm filling in. Death is... uh... unavailable.

EDGAR

Unavailable? What the hell is that suppose to... How can Death be unavailable?

CHEESE

I'm not at liberty at say.

EDGAR

If you're not Death, then who the hell are you?

CHEESE

(Dramatically)

I... Am... *Cheese!*

EDGAR

What?

CHEESE

(Dramatically)

I... Am... *Cheese!*

EDGAR

You're... cheese.

CHEESE

Not *(imitating/mocking the way Edgar said it)* cheese. *Cheese!*

EDGAR

What?

CHEESE

Are you not familiar with Cheese?

EDGAR

No, I *am* familiar with cheese, I just wasn't expecting to be escorted into the next world by it.

CHEESE

Well, then, today is your lucky day. Apart from dying, of course. That's not the greatest way to start the morning.

EDGAR

I don't believe this.

CHEESE

Then what do *you* think is going on?

EDGAR

I... I honestly don't know. Just... not this.

CHEESE

Look, I don't mean to be impatient or anything, but I am on a bit of schedule. You're not the only one dying today.

EDGAR

Why is a chunk of cheese escorting people to the Underworld. (*Sees that he has greatly offended Cheese.*) What? What did I say?

CHEESE

I'm not a *chunk* of cheese. I... Am... *Cheese!* (*Edgar just stares at him blandly. Then...*) You're supposed to be impressed.

EDGAR

Am I?

CHEESE

Whenever Death says "I... Am... *Death!*" people go all weak in the knees.

EDGAR

I guess cheese just isn't as ominous.

CHEESE

Whatever. It's time to go.

EDGAR

No.

What? CHEESE

I said no. I'm not going. EDGAR

You have to go. It's not optional. CHEESE

Well I'm not. EDGAR

(Cheese chases Edgar for a moment, trying to catch him in order to force him to travel to the Underworld. Edgar runs away from him, and that's when he notices Bruunhilde.)

Who's that?

Nobody. Come on, let's go. Please. CHEESE

Who is it? EDGAR

That's Bruunhilde. She's... uh... observing. Come on. Let's go for a walk. CHEESE
(With a big sigh...)

I'm not going anywhere with you. EDGAR

You're dead. There's no point in staying here. You don't want to spend the rest of eternity as a disembodied spectre, do you? It may sound fun at first, but it gets boring really quickly, and then you're stuck. CHEESE

I'll wait for Death. EDGAR

Death is unavailable. CHEESE

EDGAR

I'll wait.

CHEESE

Look, Eddie. May I call you Eddie? (*With a furtive glance at Bruunhilde...*) Eddie, you are really making me look bad here.

EDGAR

I am *not* getting escorted to the Underworld by a piece of— (*He stops, seeing how angry Cheese gets.*) By *Cheese*.

CHEESE

You're being really narrow-minded about this. Think of the advantages.

EDGAR

Like?

CHEESE

When Death took people, it was basically just a long, silent walk down to the river. With me, you get conversation. You get to ask questions. You get snacks, for crying out loud! Death never brought snacks for anybody.

EDGAR

What river? Are you talking about the river Styx?

CHEESE

No (*said like, "no, duhh!"*). The Styx is the river of the unbreakable oath. Are you under the onus of any unbreakable oaths? I didn't think so. You want to pass over the Acheron.

EDGAR

Why that one?

CHEESE

What are you, some kind of idiot? Because that's the one with the ferry. You would rather put on an asbestos swimsuit and try to make it across the Phlegethon?

EDGAR

I have literally no idea what you are talking about.

CHEESE

(Another big sigh.)

You really don't want to try this on your own, Eddie. Alright, here's the deal. I am going to walk you down to the Acheron. I'll keep you company while we wait for the ferryman. We can play chess or canasta or something. It'll be fun. Then when he's there, you give him your gold coin, and he takes you across to the gates of—

EDGAR

What gold coin?

CHEESE

What?

EDGAR

What gold coin?

CHEESE

The gold coin that... Didn't anyone put a gold coin on your lips?

EDGAR

What? No! Why would anyone do that?

CHEESE

You need a gold coin to pay the ferryman. He won't take you for your dazzling personality.

EDGAR

I don't have any gold coins. Besides, if you are telling the truth, I just died a few minutes ago. No one has even discovered the body yet.

CHEESE

Oh. Oh, dear. Maybe I should have waited a bit.

EDGAR

You think!?

CHEESE

(Very conscious of Bruunhilde taking notes, he takes Edgar aside and talks conspiratorially with him.)

Huh. Okay. Here's what we're gonna do. Take this. *(He hands him a chunk of cheddar cheese.)*

EDGAR

Is this what I think it is?

CHEESE

It's gold. Ish. And I happen to know that the ferryman gets a little hungry by late afternoon.

EDGAR

This is insane.

BRUUNHILDE

(Advancing...)

Is there a problem?

CHEESE

Nooo!! No problem. Eddie here is just a little nervous, and I'm helping him work through it.

(Bruunhilde makes more notes and backs off.)

EDGAR

This is all a little too weird.

CHEESE

I know what I'm doing. Trust me on this.

EDGAR

Nooo... I think I want to wait for Death.

CHEESE

(Again, glancing furtively at Bruunhilde...)

You don't want to do that. Trust in Cheese.

EDGAR

What are you not telling me?

CHEESE

Nothing!

EDGAR

You're holding out on me. What's going on?

CHEESE

Alright *(another glance back...)* Look, I could get in big trouble for telling you this, so you have to promise not to say I told you. Do you promise?

EDGAR
(Hesitating, then...)

Fine. I promise.

CHEESE
This is... kind of job interview for me.

EDGAR
An interview.

CHEESE
Right. Death... uh... Death quit. And I'm applying for the position.

EDGAR
(Trying to wrap his head around this...)
Death...

CHEESE
Quit. Said he had enough. Everyone always so sour, no one ever glad to see him. That sort of thing. So he quit. I think he got a gig at Disney or something.

EDGAR
Disney

CHEESE
Or something.

EDGAR
Disney?

CHEESE
Maybe it was Wal-Mart. Look what does it matt—

EDGAR
Disney!? Disney! Why would Disney hire Death?

CHEESE
Look, I told you. It might not have been Disney. He just wanted to go somewhere that people would be glad to see him.

EDGAR
Like FedEx.

CHEESE

Maybe. The point is that he's gone.

EDGAR

And you want his job.

CHEESE

Right!

EDGAR

Why on Earth would you want Death's job?

CHEESE

Edgar, I'm *Cheese*, damn it! It's not like there is a lot of upward growth potential here. A few millennia, and maybe I get promoted to Dairy, but that's pretty much it. Death, though. That's a great job. Important work, lots of respect. You get the cool hooded robe.

EDGAR

It is a nice robe.

CHEESE

I'm saying...

EDGAR

And the scythe.

CHEESE

There's no scythe.

EDGAR

What? No scythe?

CHEESE

He's Death, not a wheat farmer.

EDGAR

Oh.

CHEESE

So will you help me out?

EDGAR

Who else is up for the job?

CHEESE

Well, Taxes is the obvious choice, but I don't think that's going to fly. Nobody wants to be Taxes, so they're not going to let him vacate that job. (*Looks over, and sees that Bruunhilde is preparing to come over again.*) So can you help me out?

EDGAR

Well, I... I gues—

CHEESE

(*Loud, to ensure Bruunhilde hears.*)

Splendid, splendid. Then we'll be on our way. (*She pauses, and shuffles through papers on a clipboard. Then conspiratorially again as they start to exit, with this last line fading off...*) Now she's going to ask you a lot of questions, and I'm looking for 10 out of 10 on every answer. If you can do that for me, I've got a huge block of brie with your name on it...

(*Lights out*)