

MEET THE WHEELERS

BY

PAUL SCHEB

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

PA MAJON - The head of the Wheeler family cheese farm; obsessed with cheese and achieving the name of county farm of the year; has a strained relationship with his son, and finds it hard to see things another way

MA ZERELLA - The mother of the Wheelers; an optimist who invests her spare time into adventures; tries to understand her son, but still struggles; feels comfortable speaking friendly with anyone, but can sometimes talk down to others

LEVI LEATHERMAN - The eleventh son of the Leathermans; rarely noticed by anyone except Cheesebert; jealous of Cheesebert, and always tries to get the upperhand of a conversation; wants to be seen as a son by the Wheelers

CHEESEBERT - The only child of the Wheelers; lives in Michigan, but visiting for Thanksgiving; lactose intolerant, and has trouble dealing with the people of Florence; wants to be seen as Bert, and as an independent entrepreneur

MAIL COURIER* - The postal delivery worker of Florence; Often frustrated by things not going their way, but is cordial through and through when talking to others

LINDA LEATHERMAN - The chatty mother of the Leathermans; barely cares for her family, and would prefer to skip town with the Mayor; she's a former olympic skateboarder, and longs to return to that life; close with Zerella

LARRY LEATHERMAN - The father of the Leathermans; has an inferiority complex for Majon, and feigns pride in his awards; vegan, and hates being the head of the Leatherman farm, but can't bear to break the news to his wife.

MAYOR WHEATLEY* - Self-infatuated and sleazy; romantically involved with Linda Leatherman; more interested in their own gain; sees the Wheelers as a plague; debt-ridden

[CHARACTER'S WITH THE * ARE PLAYED BY THE SAME PERSON; EITHER GENDER]

SETTING

The county of Florence Wisconsin and the places within it

Time: the present

ACT I

SCENE ONE

Rather than the crow of a rooster, the sound of a cow's moo brings us into the county of Florence, Wisconsin; it is a place in the far north of the state that seldom has any residents and plenty of nature. The lights come up on the home of the Wheelers to show MA ZERELLA and PA MAJON in their dining room. Both are ready to take on the day. PA is holding a wheel of cheese to his heart.

PA: [*Stepping forward; in an animated fashion*] The wheel! Previously, presently, and futuristically the greatest invention of mankind. Let us take you way back when...

MA: Before baseball and funny cat videos

PA: Humanity decided that it was high time they found a way to bring things from point A to point B without throwing our backs out each time. So what'd we do?

MA: What'd we do Pa?

PA: I'll tell ya! [*holding out wheel*] We made this little beauty. Now you may be wondering-

MA: "How'd they make a wheel so delicious?"

PA: I'll tell ya! Before the time of cheese, we would hunt and scavenge for our food. But one day, we discovered-

A cow moos from offstage

MA: MILK!

PA: But it didn't stop there. Eventually, people storing milk soon found that it was no longer milk, but-

MA: CHEESE!

PA: Yes, Ma! Cheese indeed! Oh that wonderfully delectable aroma, the coloring, the taste! All culminating into this compact wheel of deliciousness.

MA: It's a modern day marvel!

PA: We've been a proud cheesemaking family for generations! My father was a cheesemaker, and his father was a cheesemaker, and my great great great grandfather? [*Urging the audience to guess; let them*] A cobbler.

MA: And his son?

PA: [*Reinvigorated*] A cheesemaker! And that's when we changed the family name to "Wheeler." And what a great name it is.

MA: Beckerbakerbacken didn't roll off the tongue quite as well.

PA: Finally, the Wheelers settled in the county of Florence, Wisconsin, where we've been making cheese ever since. In fact, we are the greatest cheese farm in Florence!

MA: And as a cheese farm in Wisconsin?

PA: ...A hundred and twenty-sixth.

MA: And as a farm in Wisconsin?

PA: [*Even further defeated*] ...fifty-eight thousand five hundred and first.

MA: And as a farm countrywi-

PA: [*Shushing MA*] But we're FIRST in Florence county! We even have a family saying that's been passed down with the name. Who cuts the cheese?

MA: We do! [*retracking*] Although as a *farm* in Florence, the Leathermans do tend to pull ahead every year.

PA: Gah! Those Leathermans! Every year we go toe to toe to see who's got the best farm and every year they win the county award! Ooo that don't make no sense!

MA: Oh they do have quite the lovely farm though.

PA: Zerella!

MA: But so do we.

PA: That's right. But this year's gonna be different. See, we've gotten ourselves a new farmhand who just happens to be their youngest son. [*Calling to the wings*] Leatherboy!

LEVI: [*From offstage*] Coming, Pa Majon!

PA: With a Leatherman in our midst, they won't know what hit 'em. I'm sure we'll pull through and win the County Farm of the Year Award.

MA: He really has pulled his weight around here. He's gentle with the cows, fierce with the cheese, we're quite lucky to have someone as dedicated to the craft as us Wheelers.

PA: Ehh, he may be a Leatherman, but I'll admit, it ain't bad having another hand around the farm. Still! I'm keeping my eye on him in case he tries anything funny.

LEVI LEATHERMAN enters with a burlap sack full of cheese; he is meek but energetic upon entering the house

LEVI: Well, Pa, I brought in the cheese you asked for.

PA: Did you remember everything?

LEVI: The cheddar, the gouda, the American, the mozzarella, the brie, the feta, the asiago, the Swiss, the blue, the cottage, and some camembert cheese.

PA: [*Dismissive*] Hand the bag over, Leatherboy.

LEVI hands the bag to PA; PA examines the contents; while this is happening, CHEESEBERT WHEELER enters the picture

CHEESEBERT: Well, this is the place. It's been a while, still looks the same as when I left. [*He breathes in; offput*] Eugh, smells the same too. [*Hyping himself*] Alright, you're gonna go in there, look them square in the eyes, and say, "mom, dad? I'm an entrepreneur! I'm gonna run a hardware store and you're gonna like it!... And I go by Bert now." Okay, yeah. This'll work. I just gotta be firm

As Cheesebert slowly brings himself toward the home, the family begins again

LEVI: All there, Pa?

PA: It is, but don't get cocky, Leatherboy! One hint of sabotage and you're off the farm.

LEVI: Understood.

PA: Now go store that cheese!

LEVI: Yes, Pa!

LEVI exits off to store the sack of cheese

MA: Don't you think you're too rough on him? After all he's just a- oh my.

PA: What's wrong, Zerella?

MA: Pa, isn't our son coming home today?

PA: Hey, you're right! [*Pointing up*] It's a full wheel tonight.

MA: It's been so lonely without him ever since he moved *WAY* up north.

PA: It's been years since we've held him in our loving cheesemaking arms.

A knock comes from the door as MA and PA let out a squeal of excitement. They go to let Cheesebert in

MA: That's our boy!

The door opens, and Cheesebert stands there

MA & PA: Cheesebert! [*They pull him in*]

CHEESEBERT: Mom...Dad... how are you?

PA: Dad?

MA: Mom?

PA: Ooo that just don't make no sense!

MOM: Now dear, it has been a long time. He just needs to readjust.

PA: I suppose you're right. And he's been living *WAY* up north!

CHEESEBERT: Years? It's been about two months since I moved. And I'm in Crystal Falls, Michigan. That's a ten minute drive from here.

PA: Well it feels like it.

MA: Oh but Cheesebert, now that you're back maybe you'll consider helping out on the farm again.

CHEESEBERT: That's the other thing. I refuse to suffer any longer. I want out of the cheese business.

MA and PA let out a gasp

MA: You want out?

PA: Ooo that just don't make no sense!

CHEESEBERT: I'm an entrepreneur who wants to run a hardware store... and I go by Bert now.

MA & PA: Bert?

PA: Well that's like cheese without...

MA: Without cheese!

PA: Right!

As things are heating up, LEVI returns from his duty. The two boys lock eyes for a second, then both question PA

LEVI & CHEESEBERT: [*Pointing*] Who's he?

MA: Why that's Levi Leatherman.

PA: Y'know? From the Leatherman farm *WAY* up north.

CHEESEBERT: [*stone faced*] The one a block up the road from us? I'm familiar.

LEVI: Well what about him?

MA: Don't you see the resemblance?

PA: Cheesemaking curdles through his blood.

CHEESEBERT: No it doesn't.

LEVI: He's your son?

PA: Our one and only.

MA: Is something wrong?

LEVI: No, just. I guess I felt that I was kinda-

PA: Leatherboy!

LEVI: Yes, Pa?

PA: Now that Cheeseberts back, why don't you show him the new equipment we got.

LEVI: [*Mockingly*] Cheesebert?

CHEESEBERT: It's Bert.

MA: Oh you boys will make fast friends, I'm sure of it.

PA: Go on now, get.

CHEESEBERT: But I just said I don't-

PA: GEEET!

LEVI: Come on, I'll show you the ropes, Cheesebert.

CHEESEBERT: I already don't like you.

PA: And remember, son. Who cuts the cheese?

CHEESEBERT: [*begrudgingly*] We do.

MA: Goodbye, boys!

LEVI leads CHEESEBERT offstage, leaving MA and PA to themselves

PA: Doesn't wanna be a cheesemaker...

MA: Now, Pa...

PA: Ooo that just don't make no sense!

MA: He's just having a rebellious phase, that's all. Remember when he said he wanted water with his meals instead of milk?

PA: Heh, I grounded him for a week.

MA: You sure did. Listen, he'll get over it. Just give it some time.

PA: Oh alright. Still, a hardware store? That's nowhere near as manly as being a cheesemaker.

MA: A cheesemaker is a very handsome profession. After all, that's how I came to love you.

PA: Oh Ma, and I love you. You're right, I'll give him some time. Cheesbert will string through.

PA begins to exit

MA: Pa?

PA: Just going to check on that cheese to make sure that Leatherboy stored it properly.

MA: Speaking of...

PA: Hm?

MA: Well what if we made amends with the Leathermans? Thanksgiving is right around the corner after all.

PA: Ha! After what their ancestors did? I'd rather not eat cheese for a week!

MA: You don't mean that!

PA: I mean it. And I won't budge on it either. Now if you'll excuse me I gotta see if that Leatherboy sabotaged any of my cheeses.

PA exits as MA is left alone, she sits at the table a bit defeated. She begins to read a magazine about cheese. Lights out

SCENE TWO

Lights up to LEVI and CHEESEBERT on the farm; LEVI is showing CHEESEBERT all the new equipment

LEVI: Well, we've seen the industrial cheese press, the homogenizers, the heat exchangers and mixers...

CHEESEBERT: You sure do know a lot about cheesemaking.

LEVI: Well I would hope so, it's my job.

CHEESEBERT: Why?

LEVI: Because it pays.

CHEESEBERT: No, why cheesemaking?

LEVI: It's complicated.

CHEESEBERT: Cheesemaking?

LEVI: No, why I work for the Wheelers.

CHEESEBERT: It can't be that complicated.

LEVI: It is. Now then, the cheese vats need to be cleaned biweekly, or else the rats start to incase themselves and it leads to-

CHEESEBERT: Why not work on your family's farm?

LEVI: What?

CHEESEBERT: For a job, you could always work for your family.

LEVI: No, conflicting interests.

CHEESEBERT: [*Realizing he struck*] Familial conflict?

LEVI: None of your business.

CHEESEBERT: Family business.

LEVI: I suggest you back down

CHEESEBERT: Or what? You gonna incase me in cheese with those rats?

LEVI: Curds! How many got in? [*Checking the vats*]

CHEESEBERT: You're a good fit.

LEVI: Thanks, but I don't need your approval to fit.

CHEESEBERT: You want it, though.

LEVI: Your approval?

CHEESEBERT: Anyone's. Although "paternal" seems to be preferred.

LEVI: I don't know what you're playing at, but-

CHEESEBERT: I'm just trying to get to know you. Thought it was weird how quickly my parents decided to replace me.

LEVI: You did roll off without warning.

CHEESEBERT: Ha, see? You're even using their vocabulary and it hasn't even been three months yet.

LEVI: Nothing's a matter with that.

CHEESEBERT: Never said it was. Just interesting.

LEVI: Okay. [*Digress*] Recently the local moose have been sneaking around, so Pa gave permission to use the moose whistle to drive-

CHEESEBERT: You know I know most of this already, right?

LEVI: I've been talking for two hours straight. You've said nothing.

CHEESEBERT: Yeah, but I'd rather listen to sir nerd-celot than have to sit in the same room as those loonies.

LEVI: Watch your tone! Those loonies are respectable farmers.

CHEESEBERT: Well *sorry* that I don't have cheeseballs in my eye sockets!

LEVI: They're your parents!

CHEESEBERT: Yeah, *my* parents. Not yours, because for some reason you seem to think they are.

LEVI: They very well may not be, but I'm happy here. They acknowledge me.

CHEESEBERT: From what I've seen, you mostly get yelled at.

LEVI: It's still acknowledgement. My parents never even notice me. I have ten brothers of which I'm the youngest. I never had a

plate set at the table. In fact, there wasn't even a seat at the table so I had to eat with the cows on the farm. All my brothers moved out, so my parents downgraded to a coffee table with two chairs. My birth certificate is covered in grease, and any pictures I drew got pinned on the back of the fridge. The back! I've gotten one birthday gift, which was a technicality, because when I turned eleven my parents needed a place to store the manure. So they put it in my room because they forgot I slept in there. I got cow dung for my birthday! Oh, and they left a "card" to go with it. A twelve dollar and seventy two cent receipt from Costco for batteries and a GODDAMN HOT DOG. So no, I may not have the best home life. But at least I found people who give me some attention. I don't care if I had to become a cheesemaker to get that, I'd do it again in a heartbeat. Besides, it's not all that bad. They let me eat some of the cheese.

CHEESEBERT: Wow... there is so much I can make fun of you for.

LEVI: Oh grow up.

CHEESEBERT: No, seriously, you'd make Pagliacci forget it's a tragedy.

LEVI: I swear, if you keep that up-

CHEESEBERT: And have you actually *had* a Costco dog? I'm telling you, if you did you wouldn't be as uptight about this as-

LEVI: That does it! I'm sick of getting all this slack from someone who abandoned a perfectly sustainable family because, what? He doesn't like cheese? That's ridiculous.

CHEESEBERT: Yeah, well-

LEVI: So you move way up north and don't return any calls-

CHEESEBERT: Actually Crystal Falls is like ten minutes from here-

LEVI: Ma and Pa have been worried sick, and when they finally got a response that you'd come back for a Thanksgiving dinner, you Old Yeller them!

CHEESBERT: I did not Old Yeller them!

LEVI: Oh yeah? "Hi mom, hi dad. I hate cheese and don't want anything to do with it." Bang. Dog dead. Old Yeller'd.

CHEESEBERT: I didn't even read the book.

LEVI: Well there's your Cliffsnote! As a matter of fact. With a name like "Cheesbert" you'd think you'd at least even eat cheese. Do you even eat cheese? That's like naming your kid Keanu and they haven't even seen Bill and Ted!

CHEESEBERT: I know you heard me in the house. I go by Bert, not Cheesebert.

LEVI: Then that's a shame, Cheesebert. Because you look like a Cheesebert to me, Cheesebert.

CHEESEBERT: Alright I can handle verbal abuse, but I draw the line at Cheesebert!

CHEESEBERT storms off as LEVI continues to mock him

LEVI: [Calling to him] Take some time to curdle off. Jeez what is with that guy.

A rat can be heard squeaking and scurrying around offstage, by the vats

LEVI: No no no, get away from that vat you filthy rat!

LEVI runs offstage to chase the rats off. Lights out