

# It's an Acquired Taste

by Noah Kittleson

Robert walked dolefully up to the fridge. He had progressed to a state of Hunger hitherto undiscovered by humanity. Two hours ago, when he started his half-hour commute back home, he was regretting not picking up a burrito beforehand. One hour ago, still stuck on the bus in traffic, he felt hungrier than he'd ever felt in his life. Half an hour ago, when the bus broke down and he had to walk the rest of the way home, he felt as if the only thing keeping his body from imploding inward on itself was his urge to consume.

Opening the fridge, he was reminded that he had meant to pick up groceries on his way home.

Inside there was nothing but empty takeout boxes and desolated tupperwares. Robert spent a few seconds pushing the empty containers around in an act of pure desperation, throwing them to and fro, unwilling to accept the horrible reality rapidly making itself clear to him.

"What a horrible day" he muttered.

There was one last thing left in the fridge, but finding it only plunged him deeper into despair. In the very back of the bottom left drawer was a nearly untouched wheel of Brie that Robert's roommate had left when he moved out several months ago. Robert was not the biggest fan of cheese in general. They tasted fine, just fine, but inevitably gave him horrible gas. To Robert, soft smelly cheeses were something crafted by a lunatic pursuing the goal of creating a substance so foul that even the Devil wouldn't eat it. If he had remembered at any point in the past few months that he had Brie in his fridge he would've thrown it out immediately. Now this was all he had. This is what he was reduced to.

Robert plopped The Brie down on a plate. He wasn't sure how it was supposed to look, it certainly didn't look edible. After cross-referencing with pictures on the internet he was shocked to find that it looked completely normal. A pang of hunger shot through him like a lightning bolt. Robert was stalling and his body knew it.

Gently he peeled away the tuft of plastic wrap covering the corner. The smell hit him like a wave, sending him reeling back, struggling to keep his footing. He grabbed hold of his chair, using it as a crutch to stay upright. If he got knocked down he wasn't sure he'd be able to get up again, so weak with hunger he was. The stench was a force of its own and could not be dealt with. He held his breath.

With a tear in his eye Robert grabbed a slice of The Brie and brought it up to his face. He tried to think of anything else: a cake, a hot dog, a happy childhood memory; but there was nothing. The Brie had completely taken over his mind. He had to focus all his mental energy just on commanding his body to consume this thing. It went against every natural instinct he had.

Finally he sunk his teeth into The Brie. It was like eating a garbage dump. He felt his stomach twist and turn within himself even before he had swallowed, as if it was seeing what was coming down the pipe and wanted to desperately avoid its fate in any way possible, preferably by leaving his body entirely.

"We're all in this together, buddy" he said to his stomach. The stomach didn't listen. Even worse, talking was made difficult by the fact that Robert still hadn't taken another breath.

The gooey nature of The Brie made it feel like he his whole mouth was covered in a thin slimy layer of pure putrescence. He felt that his mouth would never be clean again. It had been irrevocably defiled. The taste was not of this world. Someone had clearly found a way to form the Platonic idea of sweaty gym socks into a food. It tasted like futile, pointless human misery.

Robert needed something to cut The Brie with. Desperately he looked to the table, the counters, the floor, the ceiling, anywhere. Something in the corner of his eye caught his attention: his boots were caked in mud and twigs and leaves. It was a miracle. Without even thinking he scraped off as much as he could and covered another slice of Brie with it. Perhaps if he completely coated the damn thing and swallowed without chewing he wouldn't taste it. Robert slid the ball of Brie and mud down his throat. It did not help in the slightest.

Robert's guts were in full revolt. His stomach continued in vain its quest to vacate his body. The rest of the digestive tract was at war with itself, intent on destroying everything so it could at least go out on its own terms. He would be lucky if he still had intestines by the end of tonight.

"What a horrible day" he repeated to no one.

Robert knew that by prolonging this he was only making it worse. He couldn't continue on bite by bite. He needed to finish this right now. With both hands he pried open his mouth, shoved a fork in between his jaws and, with the final bit of resolve he had left, shoved the rest of The Brie Wheel down his throat. For one fleeting moment, Robert had the experience of being the conduit through which all suffering flows into the universe. His agony was brief, but total. It eclipsed all of humanity. Then, mercifully, he passed out from a lack of oxygen. He still hadn't taken a breath.

When Robert came to the next day it was already noon. He called his work and told them he was taking the rest of the week off. But one week came and went and Robert never came back. He moved to a new apartment in a new city and resolved to never even think of the incident again.