

## The Cheeseman

Monty Jack wasn't a popular kid at his high school. He wasn't an athlete. He wasn't an academic. He wasn't an artist of any kind. He wasn't a pretty boy. He wasn't a socialite. He had absolutely nothing going for him. He didn't even have a job. He was a strange, lonely kid. But that was okay, because what he did have made up for it all: he had a cheese collection.

At school they would whisper as he walked by. They would say things like "Look, here comes that cheese kid" and "Hey, there's that kid with all the cheese" and "Do you think he puts cheese on everything?" and "So that's why he always smells so bad!" But Monty wasn't bothered. Monty looked at the athletes. They were often stressed for a big game, or mad about a bad loss, or angry with a coach, or angry with a teammate for making a bad play. He looked at the academics. They were often stressed for a big test, or mad about a bad grade, or angry with a teacher, or angry with a classmate for making them do all the work on a group project. He looked at the artists. They were often stressed for a big art competition, or mad about a piece that didn't turn out so well, or angry with a teacher for not appreciating their work, or jealous of a fellow artist for creating a piece that did garner the teacher's admiration. He looked at the pretty boys. They were often stressed about their appearance, or mad about a bad hair day, or mad about there not being enough sun to tan, or angry about a negative comment they received, or mad at a friend for outdressing them. He looked at the socialites. They were often stressed about things their "friends" said about them behind their backs, or mad that they weren't the center of attention, or angry that this or that person didn't like them. They were also usually fake. He looked at high school kids in general. They were often stressed about life, tired of the same thing everyday. They were often unhappy, unsatisfied. Then Monty looked at himself. He had a bedroom full of cheese--all the cheeses from *Roquefort* to *ricotta*, *cheddar* to *chèvre*, *mozzarella* to *manchego*, *parmesan* to *Parmigiano-Reggiano*, *colby jack* to *cotija*. His collection included the likes of *feta*, *Gouda*, *swiss*, *camembert*, *Taleggio*, *Emmental*, and *American*, just to name a few. His collection even included *Philadelphia Cream Cheese*.

One day Monty was asked at school why he was so weird, why he, of all things, collected cheese. Monty looked down and was quiet for a while. Then he looked up and smiled. But his voice wavered as he said "Because I've held on to something you've all given up." He paused. For a moment he looked uncertain whether to continue, but then his expression changed to one of resolve. "I've retained something you've all sacrificed. I haven't sold myself." Now Monty was gaining traction. He was confident. A crowd was forming around him. His voice boomed: "I collect cheese because I've *been* to the mountaintop and I've *seen* the Promised Land, because I've seen it and I haven't *stopped* seeing it!" The crowd around Monty was stunned into silence. They hadn't expected such an answer from a kid normally so quiet and reserved. One of the more boisterous of the popular kids asked Monty what he meant. Monty smiled again. He looked that sorry sap right in the eye and said "Unlike all you suckers... I haven't forgotten how to say cheese."

The End