

CHEESE

A COMBO OF *OGGIE COODER* AND
OGGIE COODER, PARTY ANIMAL

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Oggie Cooder lay on the deserted sandy white beach sunbathing in a green and purple polka-dotted bathing suit he'd never seen before in his life. In his hand, he held a giant coconut filled with the most delicious drink he'd ever tasted, and all around him graceful palm trees swayed to and fro, dancing a hula to the sound of a distant ukelele. A fiery sun hung like a spitty yellow tennis ball overhead. Feeling the need to cool off, Oggie rose in his unfamiliar polka-dotted bathing suit, ran down to the water's edge, and waded in. As he paddled out into the crystal blue sea, the warm salty waves lapped against his cheek and the air was filled with the sweet tropical aroma of dog breath.

Wait a second, thought Oggie, DOG BREATH?

He opened his eyes. His dog, Turk, was standing next to him, licking his face. The whole thing had been a *dream*. Oggie wiped the dog slobber off his cheek and looked over at the clock. 7:45 on the dot.

“Good dog,” he said, reaching over to give Turk a pat on the head. “You’re a regular alarm clock. Except that you’re furry. And you have fleas. And really bad breath.”

Turk, whose real name was Turkey-On-Rye because that was the name of Oggie’s favorite sandwich, barked and raced out of the room, only to return a minute later with a soggy yellow tennis ball in his mouth. He whined and wagged his giant tail, nearly knocking a lamp off the bedside table.

“Okay, okay, I get the message,” said Oggie, sitting up and rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “Go get your leash and I’ll walk you around the block before school.”

And that was how Oggie Cooder, future famous cheese carving champion of the world, started his day.

* * *

By the time Oggie got back from walking Turk that morning, his parents had already left for work. They'd gone in early to meet with a plumber about fixing a leaky pipe that had been giving them some trouble at their store. Oggie poured himself a quick bowl of cereal and picked up the mail, which was sitting in a pile on the kitchen table.

"Bills, bills, junk, bills . . ." he said as he sorted through the letters. "Hold on. Is this what I think it is? *Yes!*" He held the long pale blue envelope aloft.

"Prrrrrr-ip! Prrrrrr-ip!" Oggie fluttered his tongue against the roof of his mouth. He always made that sound when he was excited about something. At the moment, the something he was excited about was a letter from the Bakestuff Company about the name-the-new-bagel contest he had entered several weeks earlier. Oggie loved contests, and had been waiting eagerly to hear whether he had won the grand prize — a trip to Hawaii. He'd been dreaming about sandy beaches and palm trees practically every night. Although he had never won

anything in his life, he was hopeful that he might actually have a shot at winning the Bakestuff contest. Oggie was very proud of the name he had come up with for a cinnamon-raisin bagel. He had gotten the idea from something he'd overheard his mother say on the phone one day when she was talking to his Aunt Hettie.

"You better warn the neighbors ahead of time, Het, 'cause we're definitely going to be raisin' the roof," she'd said.

"What's the matter with Aunt Hettie's roof?" Oggie had asked his mother after she'd hung up.

Mrs. Cooder laughed.

"That's just an expression, Ogg," she explained. "'Raisin' the roof' means 'having a good time.' Your Aunt Hettie and I were talking about the family reunion we're going to have this summer."

"Is Uncle Vern coming?" Oggie asked hopefully.

Uncle Vern was Oggie's favorite relative. He drove a pickup truck with a jacked-up rear end, and he could make his belly button talk without using his hands.