

But I'm French
a comedy in one act

By Terry Roueche

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Cast of Characters

CHARLES - 20s or 30s. Energetic. You can't help but like Charles. He speaks to PENELOPE with a "French" sounding accent.

PENELOPE - around the same age as Charles. She's the serious minded professional type. A no nonsense type person. Attractive and stylish.

Place

Anywhere

Time

Present

- But I'm French -

The Set: Empty stage.

At Rise: CHARLES is holding cheese in a wrapper.
HE speaks to PENELOPE with a "French"
accent.

PENELOPE
(Extremely frustrated)
You are driving me crazy!

CHARLES
(CHARLES does not pronounce the French word for
cheese properly, but with creativity)
Fromage.

PENELOPE
Stop the stupid French accent!

CHARLES
Fromage. Fromage. It excites you.

PENELOPE
You're not even pronouncing the word right. It's -
(Proper French pronunciation)
"fromage" - you can't speak French.

CHARLES
How else could I have known what they say?

PENELOPE
It was obvious. They were buying cheese.
(Then)
Open the fromage and smell it. Go ahead. Let me see you eat
it.

CHARLES

It's a strong cheese. I eat it all the time.

PENELOPE

No you don't.

CHARLES

Yes I do.

PENELOPE

Smell it.

CHARLES

We get some French bread ... wine ... maybe I take you to the countryside ... we spread a coverlet ... make rash, bold love under the stars ... oo-la-la ...

PENELOPE

Open it and smell it ... open it ...

CHARLES

Martine said it was her favorite ...

PENELOPE

Now which one was Martine?

CHARLES

The petite cute one.

(To audience with his normal voice)

The girls were looking for French cheese. They were speaking French. I understood them.

(To PENELOPE)

I talked to them. You heard me. You explain it.

PENELOPE

(Under CHARLES)

No ... listen ...

CHARLES

(Continuous, to audience with his normal voice)

When Martine said "fromage" everything clicked ... just like that. It was so amazing. Like I could hear, finally for the first time ... see, finally for the first time ...

(Boldly)

I am French.

PENELOPE

But I'm French page 4

(Under CHARLES)
You don't know French ...

CHARLES
(Continuous, to audience with his normal voice)
I found life as a Frenchman.

PENELOPE
Then what do you think you said to them?

CHARLES
(To audience with his normal voice)
It's a miracle. I don't care. A gift. Whatever. Fine.

PENELOPE
(Under, "...I don't care. A gift. Whatever.
Fine.")
You really embarrassed me.

CHARLES
(Continuous, to audience with his normal voice)
Do you have to be six years old to find out you're a prodigy?
I heard the two girls speaking. One said "fromage". Then it
was there. French. In my head. Like a mother language.

PENELOPE
This is ridiculous.

CHARLES
(Continuous, to audience with his normal voice)
We were right beside the girls, looking at the cheese ... one
girl asked the other if they should try American cheese ... of
course they wanted French cheese ... they were very French ...
flat heels, no stockings, short skirts, fitted blouses, dark
shoulder-length wavy hair.

(Then)
They wanted to try American cheese, but what did they know
about American cheese? I tried to help.

PENELOPE
You don't know what they said. You can't speak French.

CHARLES
I understood every word they said.

PENELOPE

You couldn't have. You didn't.

CHARLES

I did. Every word.

PENELOPE

I'm more French than you. My mother's grandparents came from Alsace.

CHARLES

Then that explains what attracted me to you. You're French.

PENELOPE

I'm not any more French than you are.

CHARLES

I tell you I can't explain.

PENELOPE

This is not workingt. I'm tired. Really. Tired. I've worked hard all week. A lot of pressure. A new boss. I think he likes me ... **likes me** ...

CHARLES

No. I am jealous ... who is this supervisor?

PENELOPE

Shut up. I'm going home. I'm exhausted ...

CHARLES

I can make you feel ... a whole lot better.

PENELOPE

No. Don't make me feel better ... get away.

CHARLES

But I want to ...

PENELOPE

We were just going to my place tonight. But I'm the one that said let's run out for a movie, pick up something to eat. And I told you. I was very clear. We watch a movie. That's all. We watch one movie. Even before now I didn't want you to stay over. I just want to go to bed early, alone. I'm going home. I'm going home alone. This ... never mind ...

CHARLES

(To audience with his normal voice)

I had to help those girls. Their first time here in America. Actually they were both beauticians here for a convention in Las Vegas. They won a little money at roulette. They wanted to

CHARLES (cont'd)

see the country. Cash to burn. Shop for new wardrobe. They rent a car ... they were just totally astonished by the Grand Canyon ... they just couldn't believe the American Southwest.

PENELOPE

(Under, "...believe the American Southwest.")

You were flirting with those girls ...

CHARLES

(To audience with his normal voice)

They went to see Memphis. Elvis. Nashville. Can you believe ... big Country and Western fans from France. They were on their way to Florida. Just here for the night. I was being friendly.

PENELOPE

(Under, "I was being friendly.")

Were you trying to make me jealous?

CHARLES

(To audience with his normal voice)

The truth is there's no American cheese like the French cheese, but I told them maybe give American cheese a shot. They are in America. Experience things. I suggest they be a little open-minded. But we're French. That does not come easily.

PENELOPE

I don't know what you were speaking. It wasn't French. You can't speak French. Say something in French if you think you suddenly speak French.

CHARLES

What would you like me to say?

PENELOPE

God. Anything. I had French. I remember some. Tell me that you love me. In French. Don't mean it. I don't want you to love me any more.

CHARLES

But I do.

PENELOPE

Say it. Tell me you love me ... don't mean it ...

CHARLES

You know I love you.

PENELOPE

In French!

CHARLES

(To audience with his normal voice)

My life from that moment in front of the cheese cooler can never be the same. I'm supposed to be French.

PENELOPE

You were speaking gibberish. Did you see how they looked at you?

CHARLES

They understood me. They spoke back to me.

PENELOPE

Then what'd they say.

CHARLES

You heard them.

PENELOPE

What'd they say.

CHARLES

(Very unsure. HE seems to invent on the spot)

That shorter girl said she misses the cheese in France. But they like the food in general here.

(HE seems to gain confidence)

They think Americans are very nice...

PENELOPE

(Extremely frustrated)

You weren't speaking a known language. You were making it up. It just sounded like stupid French sounds. You were scaring them.

