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MILK AND COOKIES

By Jonathan Dorf

Cast of Characters

MARGARET NANCY REAGAN BALLMOTH, married thirtysomething mother
JACKIE, her seven year old son, played by the actor who plays Rufus
BRUCE, the average-looking man from the milk carton and about Marge's age
BLONDIE, a mysterious, youngish, probably—but necessarily—blonde woman
MARGE'S HUSBAND, played by the actor who plays Rufus
RUFUS, a freelance version of the witness protection program living in Montana

SCENE 1

(A kitchen/living room somewhere in California. Early evening. MARGE, thirtysomething mother, stops to scrutinize the carton before pouring milk into a bowl of flour. On the table are four place settings, one of which includes a martini. Enter JACKIE, her seven year old son, played by an adult actor.)

MARGE

There's a grown man on the milk carton.

JACKIE

Can I have milk and cookies?

MARGE

Sometimes you see a man and a child, but when was the last time you saw a single man on a milk carton?

JACKIE

I'm having two cookies.

MARGE

Not before dinner. It says "wanted," but it doesn't say why.

JACKIE

(mispronouncing "murdered")

Maybe he murdered somebody.

MARGE

Murdered.

JACKIE

Please? It won't ruin my appetite.

MARGE

Doesn't it normally say "missing" or "have you seen me?"

(Marge turns on the TV. Enter BLONDIE, a youngish woman, not necessarily blond, but so covered by a dark scarf, sunglasses and a coat that it's hard to tell what she looks like. She might appear from behind the TV. Jackie opens a cookie tin.)

BLONDIE

Tragedy struck Interdependence Bank earlier today when a teller vomited into the drive-through drawer. He later began seizing and died.

(Jackie comes over to watch.)

The cause of death is still unconfirmed at this time, as are the origin of the poison cookies.

(brief pause)

Oops.

(Marge grabs the cookies from Jackie. Exit Blondie as Marge turns off the TV.)

JACKIE

It's not *these* cookies.

MARGE

What's not these cookies?

JACKIE

The poison cookies.

MARGE

Of course not. I baked these cookies.

JACKIE

You baked the poison cookies too.

(The DOORBELL RINGS.)

Me and Lizzie—

MARGE

Lizzie and I—

JACKIE

Lizzie and I put the poison in the cookies, and those are the ones we gave the man at the drive-through window. At the bank.

(The DOORBELL RINGS again.)

I called the police and told them we made the cookies so they wouldn't take all the cookies out of the store.

MARGE

You called the police?

(A third DOORBELL RING.)

JACKIE

Nine-one-one. That's the police—right?

MARGE

Did you tell them your name?

JACKIE

They said they'd be over in a few minutes.

MARGE

Shoot.

JACKIE

You shouldn't curse.

MARGE

Shoot isn't cursing. Shoot is what we say instead of cursing.

(beat)

Shit. Daddy promised to flush his controlled substances, but we all know Daddy never keeps his promises.

JACKIE

Is shit cursing?

Shit is cursing.

MARGE

Bad language!

JACKIE

Shit.

MARGE

(Marge races to the closet and unearths a suitcase.)

Bad language!

JACKIE

I'll curse if I feel like it.

MARGE

Why is there a suitcase in the closet?

JACKIE

Because Mommy has a sixth sense.

MARGE

What's that?

JACKIE

Mommy's psychic. Except that I assumed Daddy would eventually hire a hit man.

MARGE

(Jackie grabs the suitcase. It's a tug of war.)

Mom!

JACKIE

You'll be fine. You're a minor.

MARGE

Where are you—

JACKIE

(Marge wins the tug of war.)

You'll get off. They'll throw me in jail. Selfish little—

MARGE

JACKIE

Who's gonna' make me dinner? You're supposed to make—

MARGE

Ask the police for a donut.

JACKIE

What about Lizzie?

(There's BANGING, as if on a door, from offstage. Marge pulls out her checkbook, then rips out a handful of checks and signs with abandon.)

MARGE

There's two thousand in the checking account. Take it. I'll use plastic.

JACKIE

When are you coming back?

MARGE

After dinner.

JACKIE

I'm sorry. I wouldn't 'a done it if I knew you were gonna' get so mad. I won't do it again.

MARGE

Do you love me, sweetie?

JACKIE

Yes! Please don't leave.

MARGE

Do you really love me?

(She kisses him on the forehead.)

Be a dear and don't let the police in until you check under Mommy and Daddy's mattress for any baggies with powder or pills in them and flush three times.

JACKIE

Mom!

MARGE

I'm going out the back. Daddy's number in Tokyo is on the refrigerator. Actually, on the freezer door. Make him a fresh martini if he comes back.

But Mom!

JACKIE

MARGE
 If anybody asks, make sure you tell them the controlled substances are Daddy's and that Mommy didn't know anything about it.

Mommy!

JACKIE
 (She exits.)
 I can't reach the freezer!

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(Late that night. Marge, dragging her suitcase by its now-broken handle and limping badly, walks along a highway. Enter a "car"—maybe chairs on wheels—driven by BRUCE, the average-looking man from the milk carton. He stops.)

Hi.

BRUCE

Excuse me?

MARGE

Hi.

BRUCE

Oh. Yes. Hi.

MARGE

Everything all right?

BRUCE

Fine.

MARGE

Everything's fine with me too.

BRUCE

Good. **MARGE**

No. Just fine. **BRUCE**

MARGE
I wasn't correcting you. I just meant it's *good* that everything is fine.

BRUCE
I didn't think you were correcting me. *I* was correcting *you*. I thought you were trying to equate good with fine.

No. Never. **MARGE**

BRUCE
You don't look fine. You're limping.

MARGE
(beat)
Have I seen you before?

No. **BRUCE**

MARGE
I know I've seen you before.

BRUCE
I'm a model.

MARGE
You?

BRUCE
A lot of companies want average-looking models. In fact, I know a bunch of ugly people who work all the time.

MARGE
Milk carton. That's where I've seen you. You were on my milk carton.

BRUCE
Low fat or skim?

Whole. **MARGE**

You drink whole milk? **BRUCE**

Are you a milk model . . . Bruce? **MARGE**

Bruce? Who's Bruce? **BRUCE**

You are. Aren't you? **MARGE**

My name is Howard. I think you have me confused. **BRUCE**

I don't believe you. **MARGE**

That I'm a milk model, or that my name is Howard? **BRUCE**

Either one. Why were you on my milk carton? **MARGE**

(Marge loses hold of her suitcase and ends up on her butt. Bruce gets "out" of his car to help.)

You're not fine or good or even almost fine. **BRUCE**
(beat)

Get in.

In your car? A strange man's car? **MARGE**

I'm not sure you know me well enough to judge me. Can I help you with that? **BRUCE**

Where were you an hour ago when the handle broke and I dropped it on my foot? **MARGE**

(Marge almost gets to her feet.)

BRUCE

I didn't want to intrude.

(beat)

I've been following you—you looked like you were going to need help. I just didn't know when.

MARGE

You've been following me?

BRUCE

Not a strict follow—I drive back and forth. Where are you going?

MARGE

I don't know that I should tell you.

BRUCE

If I was on your milk carton, I'm not exactly a stranger. I was in your home. My face was in your refrigerator. We connected over your morning coffee.

(beat)

You're not going anywhere on that ankle.

MARGE

Then I'll sleep.

BRUCE

On the shoulder?

MARGE

I'll crawl off the shoulder.

BRUCE

It's a twenty foot drop.

MARGE

Surely somewhere on this highway there isn't a twenty foot drop.

BRUCE

Absolutely. Opens way up in eight miles.

MARGE

Eight miles?

BRUCE

Give or take a tenth or two.

(Beat, then Marge allows Bruce to help with the suitcase. She gets "in" to the car.)

MARGE

Are you missing?

BRUCE

I hope so, considering the alternative.

MARGE

What's the alternative?

BRUCE

Being found. How did you remember my name?

MARGE

It's rare to see a single man on a milk carton. You stayed with me.

BRUCE

Was I attractive? Oh—never mind. You answered that.

MARGE

I did?

BRUCE

The modeling dig. You said "you?" in disbelief.

(beat)

I'd like to trust you. Of course, I'm at an incredible disadvantage. You've been living with my milk carton, and I—I don't know you . . .

MARGE

You've been stalking me.

BRUCE

For an hour.

MARGE

Marge. Margaret Nancy Reagan . . . I'd rather not say my last name just yet.

(beat)

My son, Jackie, is seven. Lizzie, my daughter—his sister—is five. They poisoned the teller at the drive-through window of our local bank. I love that bank, because it's really a local bank and not part of a faceless corporation. I wonder if it'll get taken over now.

BRUCE

People might not feel safe banking there anymore. They lose confidence sometimes when employees die on the job.

(beat)

It's not your fault.

MARGE

It is. In the eyes of the law, I'm guilty. Properly supervised children don't poison people. It never happens. If they'd been watching TV or playing video games or reading the comics, they wouldn't have spiked the cookies. And my husband left his stash under our mattress, but he's in Tokyo on business and having an affair with a geisha he met on his last trip, so that leaves me as the responsible adult and the fall person.

(beat)

Where are we going?

BRUCE

Where would you like to go?

MARGE

You're not going somewhere?

BRUCE

Away.

MARGE

That's fine.

BRUCE

Good or fine?

MARGE

Good.

(Enter Blondie with Jackie.)

BLONDIE

This just—

JACKIE

Mommy!

BLONDIE

This—

JACKIE

I'm so hungry.

BLONDIE

Be quiet or I'll choke you with a donut.

(beat)

This just in: on the tenth anniversary of the heist of a carton of two percent milk from Sam's Twenty Four Hour Market in Los Angeles, still no leads. And now, a word from our sponsor, the Milk Corporation.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(Early the next morning in the stopped car. A scenic highway pull-off in Nevada, not far from the California border.)

BRUCE

A cow.

MARGE

Where?

BRUCE

Nowhere. Just thought of it. It looks so benign. Moo. Do you think it has any idea what it started, what's going on?

MARGE

What?

(Bruce puts a finger to his lips, motions for Marge to get out of the car. They both get out of the car. He puts it in drive and lets it go, perhaps indicated by pushing it offstage. CRASH from offstage.)

What the hell?

BRUCE

You never know who might be listening.

MARGE

Where?

BRUCE

In the car.

MARGE

Are you insane?

BRUCE

I didn't leave my children before dinner. And I'm not named after Nancy Reagan.

MARGE

It's a *middle* name.

(beat)

It wasn't my fault. My mother—may she rest in . . . peace —apparently told my father Nancy Reagan's going to be somebody. Let's make our daughter a somebody.

BRUCE

What a horrible responsibility to put on a child.

(Bruce gestures toward the car)

Throws 'em off the trail.

MARGE

But the car.

BRUCE

Stolen. Made a strange clunk. I crash 'em every couple weeks. Surprised they aren't on to me yet.

MARGE

They?

BRUCE

What do you think of that VW over there?

(He points offstage.)

MARGE

You're not going to steal that VW.

BRUCE

Who said anything about stealing it? I just asked for your opinion.

MARGE

It's not really my color.

BRUCE

We won't have it for more than a week or two.

MARGE

A week? I won't be here in a week!

BRUCE

Where else are you going?

MARGE

You can't walk up to a car and . . . steal it.

BRUCE

I run. I run up to the car and steal it.

(beat)

I have no choice.

(Bruce pulls Marge over to the side of the stage.)

Milk.

(brief pause)

It's a conspiracy. I'm not big on conspiracies—I don't believe in the grassy knoll or a military-industrial complex, but there is a milk complex. *That's* a fact. I've always wondered if JFK was about to announce a switch to soy.

MARGE

And . . .

BRUCE

I know too much.

MARGE

And . . .

BRUCE

They know I know.

MARGE

They being . . .

BRUCE

The milk people.

MARGE

Milk people as in made out of milk, or drinking milk—

BRUCE

Don't be ridiculous. They're certainly not made out of milk. They may drink it. They probably do. Do you remember that movie, *The President's Analyst*?

MARGE

About the phone company.

BRUCE

Yes. Made by the milk people. Red herring. Get everybody thinking phone company.

MARGE

But there's not even *one* phone company. The Baby Bells—

BRUCE

Modeled on La Famiglia. Could be true. All those clicks and static make you wonder if somebody's listening, but most folks don't take the phone company seriously as a threat. Maybe they should. Maybe if the movie had been better. Still, it only would've been a matter of time.

MARGE

Until . . . ?

BRUCE

Until we moved on to the post office.

MARGE

The post office!

BRUCE

Shhh! We take no chances. But my theory is that the post office is a decoy.

MARGE

A decoy.

BRUCE

Come on. Dead letters. Postal workers programmed to take out hard targets using some trumped up "burnout" pretext to explain how they acquired an Uzi and thousands of rounds of ammo. Either they're just a bunch of really angry sociopaths, or somebody else is pulling the strings.

MARGE

Somebody else?

BRUCE

Milk. As long as a mail carrier grabs a headline every few months by shooting up the local mall, nobody's gonna' wonder what's up with milk.

MARGE

So you're saying that the post office is—

BRUCE

Puppets. Milk puppets.

(beat)

Fat Elvis versus Thin Elvis. Does that sound like anyone capable of hatching an effective conspiracy? They're hired goons. I'm not saying they're not dangerous. Everybody who's lying in a box because some mailman put him there would have something to say on that score. But it'd be interesting to see if all these hapless victims have something more in common than being in the wrong place when a postal worker went postal.

MARGE

Like milk.

(Bruce suddenly ducks and grabs Marge's arm.)

BRUCE

Get down!

(She ducks. Pause)

Dairy truck.

MARGE

Dairy?

BRUCE

Cheese.

MARGE

And they're . . .

BRUCE

Oh yeah.

(Pause. Bruce looks around. Beat. They stand cautiously.)

Time to get moving.

(Marge nods.)

Remember when I told you I wasn't going anywhere in particular?

(Marge nods.)

I lied—though I try to wander around enough that it looks like I'm going in circles. In fact, I *have* been going in a number of circles.

MARGE

For how long?

BRUCE

Several years.

MARGE

Several?

BRUCE

Almost ten. But not anymore. I recently came into possession of a piece of information that has given me direction.

MARGE

And now you're going . . . to . . .

BRUCE

Rufus.

MARGE

Rufus? Is that—what is that?

BRUCE

Rufus is—I think Rufus is a person.

MARGE

A man. Sounds like a black man. A nice, strong black man with . . . I almost married a—

BRUCE

I don't know. I'm not sure if it's a real name or an alias. It's his street name. Duck.

(They duck.)

Coffee truck.

(They get up.)

Jury's still out on coffee. They may be collaborators.

(beat)

Word is, you go to Rufus, you get a new identity.

MARGE

Like the witness protection program?

BRUCE

Sort of. From what I hear. Rufus is all very third-hand. At best. More rumor than any hand really. Possibly a finger.

MARGE

Do you mean a figment?

BRUCE

Or a suspicion. A suspicion many people share, based on some actual information. At one time.

MARGE

What?

BRUCE

What do you mean "what"?

MARGE

The actual information. What is it?

(Bruce shrugs helplessly.)

BRUCE

I know it existed at one time. I was told that there was actual information by someone who knew it firsthand.

MARGE

But this person never told you what it was.

BRUCE

Exactly.

MARGE

(brief pause)

Where is—

BRUCE

I'm not sure.

MARGE

But you have some idea. Some approximate—

BRUCE

Montana.

MARGE

Montana! Montana's huge. And we're in California.

BRUCE

Actually, we crossed over to Nevada during the night.

MARGE

But Montana. The white supremacists live there. Rufus—he's not a black man; he's a redneck! He's a gun-packing, tobacco-chewing redneck who wants to roll back the American clock and kill the bison and burn crosses in black people's lawns.

BRUCE

I had no idea you were so passionate about, uh . . .

MARGE

It's my one cause.

BRUCE

Which one?

MARGE

All of them, kind of mixed up like that.

BRUCE

Not everyone in Montana is a white supremacist.

MARGE

But it has a reputation.

BRUCE

Maybe even a predisposition, but Rufus didn't move to Montana because he's a white supremacist.

MARGE

How do you know?

BRUCE

(counts on his fingers)

Fifth-hand information.

MARGE

So why did he—

BRUCE

If your job was helping people become invisible, would you domicile in—

MARGE

What?

BRUCE

What?

MARGE

Domicile?

BRUCE

Sorry—remnant of my college days. “Live.” Anyway, if your job were helping people become invisible, Montana's got to be ideal. You wouldn't pick Washington, D.C.

MARGE

Montana.

BRUCE

Idaho might work. Or maybe Wyoming.

MARGE

What about Alaska?

BRUCE

Too cut off. Hard to get to.

MARGE

I should call home.

BRUCE

You can't.

MARGE

Why not?

BRUCE

(entwining his fingers)

Milk and the phone company are like this.

MARGE

I just wish I knew for sure they had dinner. And that they're having breakfast. And clean underwear.

BRUCE

I'm sure the police fed them something. Don't know about the underwear.

(Lights up on Blondie and Jackie, who tries to talk but has his mouth stuffed with donuts.)

BLONDIE

Moments ago, Margaret Nancy Reagan Ballmoth's seven year old son made this desperate plea:

(Jackie struggles to speak, but it's unintelligible.)

So Mom, if you're out there, come home and make dinner. Next: the former manager of Sam's Twenty-Four Hour Market speaks out against the now-missing store security guard he holds responsible for America's most wanted carton of two-percent milk.

(Lights out on Blondie and Jackie, who exit.)

BRUCE

You can't go back.

MARGE

I ran out on my children.

BRUCE

A gesture which the police will not greet with unbridled enthusiasm. And then of course there's the murder.

MARGE

Oh god—I forgot.

BRUCE

And your husband's stash.

MARGE

I hadn't seen that in so long, I forgot all about it.

BRUCE

Try arguing *that* defense.

(beat)

You're looking at this all wrong.

(beat)

Did these kids of yours ask permission before they murdered the teller? Did your husband ask if you minded sleeping on his drugs every night? Did they think about the impact their actions might have on your life? Trust me, after what that bunch pulled, nobody'd fault you for a self-centered moment. And this can be fun.

MARGE

Fun?

BRUCE

Forget living out of a car or wearing the same clothes every day. Quit worrying about your cookie killer kids and the husband who chose leaving the country over living with you, and forget the neverending cat and mouse game and the endless ducking as cars go by. We may be the mice, but mice are frontrunners. We go where we want, do what we want, and all they can do is chase after us and clean up the droppings.

MARGE

I won't steal a VW for you.

BRUCE

Is it the fact that it's a VW?

(Marge shakes her head.)

Please? We could be on our way to Montana, a state I've never seen, to chase after the rumor of a man I'm not a hundred percent sure exists. The two of us— together! I'd really like that, Marge.

MARGE

Really?

BRUCE

Really.

MARGE

(beat)

I can't do it. I'd like to, but—

BRUCE

I'm not asking you to steal it. I'm just asking you to come along.

MARGE

What exactly do you mean by come along?

BRUCE

Moral support. Maybe some help in a pinch.

(He gestures toward the offstage VW. Pause. A distant SIREN sounds. Marge listens intently.)

BRUCE

Probably just be a fire truck. Maybe.

(Beat. Marge follows Bruce toward the offstage VW.)

Put on that happy face, Marge—this is gonna' be fun.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(Marge sits on a bench at a rest stop in northern Nevada. Late afternoon. Bruce enters holding a large screwdriver.)

BRUCE

Need any quarters? I'm amazed at the business these rest area slots do.

MARGE

I can't believe no one says anything when you do that.

BRUCE

I cut in the witnesses.

(beat)

Would you like to try? You were great with the VW—

MARGE

I did that because if I didn't, you would have left me standing in the empty parking space.

BRUCE

Aww...I knew you'd pull through.

MARGE

I feel terrible about the VW.

BRUCE

The hanger barely scratched it. Who drops a coat hanger in a parking lot?

MARGE

I regret the VW.

BRUCE

It drives great. Better than . . . what was that car?

MARGE

I've noticed a hum.

BRUCE

I doubt the hum is from the scratch.

MARGE

A sympathy hum. I saw it on a public access talk show. Your home appliance or automobile or whatever actually has a mind of its own, and if you attack it—

BRUCE

By scratching it?

MARGE

Or otherwise abusing it, the unaffected parts of the thing rally around the injured part, using whatever means are at their disposal to protect it from further damage or to send a message that this act of war will not go unchallenged—

BRUCE

Take the screwdriver. You'll feel better.

MARGE

I am not comfortable using a screwdriver.

BRUCE

Would you like a hammer?

MARGE

Maybe I should just wait in the bathroom to mug people.

BRUCE

You could. If you'd enjoy yourself. Piece of advice, though.

MARGE

What?

BRUCE

Pick people smaller than you.

(beat)

Something you should know about the hammer.

MARGE

What—a gift from your dying mother?

BRUCE

I wish.

MARGE

She never gave you anything?

BRUCE

She's not dying. I found the hammer under the seat of the VW. It was already in the car when we stole it.

MARGE

Please don't say "stole."

BRUCE

What's a VW driver doing with a hammer under the seat?

MARGE

Maybe he's a contractor. A carpenter.

BRUCE

It was the only tool in the car.

MARGE

What about the screwdriver?

BRUCE

Mine. I strap it to my leg.

(beat)

This VW driver wasn't just making a happy little commute. You don't carry a hammer, especially not the monster he's got, without a reason. Somewhere out there, somebody's singing along to "Someone Saved My Life Tonight" and doesn't know how right they are.

MARGE

You think we stopped a . . . murder?

BRUCE

We might have. Odds are that we did. Congrats, Marge. You're a heroine.

MARGE

How does that justify my breaking into a slot machine?

BRUCE

Why does it have to?

MARGE

It would be nicer if it did.

BRUCE

Why does anything have to? Why do you have to?

MARGE

I'm not used to doing things just because I want to.

BRUCE

You stole the VW.

MARGE

I got in when *you* stole it.

BRUCE

You were an equal partner.

MARGE

The police were coming.

BRUCE

(beat)

Isn't there something you did . . . just because? Tennis? Gardening?

(slight pause)

Sex?

MARGE

(shakes her head)

It felt relatively OK, but it was mostly for the procreational value. The two-point-two children. My husband really wanted to keep up with the Joneses. They lived across the street.

BRUCE

Isn't there anything?

MARGE

I liked chocolate marshmallow ice cream. I had it five years ago on New Year's Eve. There was a choice of plain chocolate or chocolate marshmallow.

BRUCE

It's a start. Take the hammer.

MARGE

I don't know if I could take the hammer.

BRUCE

What about taking a few good whacks while you think about it?

MARGE

I don't think I could swing a hammer in anger—

BRUCE

Anger? What are you angry about? I'm not angry.

MARGE

What if a member of the highway patrol comes by?

BRUCE

Marge, we can't go on like this.

MARGE

Like how?

BRUCE

The way we are. You're depressing me. I'm sorry, but it had to be said.

MARGE

Why do I depress you?

BRUCE

Hemming and hawing about your kids, hemming and hawing about stealing the VW, hemming and hawing about a hammer. And now the highway patrol might show up. You hem and haw too much.

(beat)

Yes, the people at milk and their police flunkies are closing the gap, and we can't run indefinitely. But we know all that. We don't have to remind ourselves. You don't have to remind me.

MARGE

If I see a milk truck, should I pretend I don't see it?

BRUCE

I'm not saying that. I'm saying if you don't see a milk truck, don't imagine there's one around the corner.

MARGE

Even if there might be.

BRUCE

There always might be a milk truck around the corner. We can't stop living.

MARGE

I'm not living?

BRUCE

You're not living it up.

MARGE

Because I won't break into a slot machine?

BRUCE

That's just a symptom.

MARGE

What's the cure?

BRUCE

Why are you on this trip?

MARGE

Isn't that obvious by now?

BRUCE

See? You're always so negative.

MARGE

I'm looking for Rufus—is that better?

BRUCE

What do you want when we find him?

MARGE

(beat)

People don't ask me what I want. I'd never join the army, but if I did, I'd make a fantastic private. Marching around, following everybody's orders.

(beat)

I don't have a choice. I'm a fugitive.

BRUCE

Do you like that?

MARGE

Of course not. If I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't have children before I was ready, I wouldn't be named after someone I have no hope of living up to, I wouldn't be stuck with my shotgun husband whose drugs spend more time in our house than he does.

BRUCE

So drop it. Give it up.

MARGE

I can't just—

BRUCE

Why not? That's what *I'm* doing. As soon as I get this milk monkey off my back, I'll be a new man.

MARGE

You make it sound so easy.

BRUCE

Why can't it be?

(Blondie enters, perhaps appearing from behind the bench.)

BLONDIE

Got milk?

BRUCE

No.

BLONDIE

Me neither. How 'bout her?

BRUCE

(shakes his head)

She hates the stuff.

BLONDIE

Can't be too careful.

BRUCE

Know what you mean.

BLONDIE

Rufus sent me.

MARGE

Rufus!

BLONDIE

Not so loud.

BRUCE

(puts a finger to his lips—beat)

So he exists.

I'd rather not say.

BLONDIE

Of course. Will you take us to him?

BRUCE

No.

BLONDIE

Why not?

BRUCE

I don't know where he is. If he definitely exists, that is.

BLONDIE

But he sent you to us.

BRUCE

Yes.

BLONDIE

So he exists.

BRUCE

Probably. Yes. Maybe. Don't put words in my mouth.

BLONDIE

Have I seen you on TV?

MARGE

I've never been on the news.
(brief pause)

He called me.

BRUCE

He called?

BLONDIE

Yes. I should probably go.

BRUCE

He called. But you've never actually seen him.

BLONDIE

I have.

Where? **BRUCE**

Was it in Montana? **MARGE**

How does she know about Montana? **BLONDIE**

Where in Montana? **BRUCE**

Behind a Seven-Eleven. Actually, I don't know if it was a Seven-Eleven. It could have been any convenience— **BLONDIE**

Where? **BRUCE**

- store. **BLONDIE**

What city? **BRUCE**

I don't know. I was blindfolded. **BLONDIE**

Then how did you know it was a Seven-Eleven? **BRUCE**

He let me take off the blindfold when I got there. I could see an "open twenty-four hours" sign. **BLONDIE**

How did you get to the Seven-Eleven if you were blindfolded? **MARGE**

Mary, stay out of this. **BRUCE**

Who? **MARGE**

BRUCE

(gestures to Marge)

You, *Mary*.

MARGE

(gets it)

Right. All right . . . Bart.

BRUCE

How did you get to the Seven-Eleven if you were blindfolded?

BLONDIE

I drove. I thought your names were Bruce and Marge.

BRUCE

You drove blindfolded?

BLONDIE

It's really not that hard. He gave me directions while I was driving. It's—

MARGE

Crazy.

BLONDIE

Exhilarating. Knowing you might crash. The risk.

MARGE

Exhilarating.

BLONDIE

Aren't you Bruce and Marge?

(Bruce puts a finger to his lips and nods.)

MARGE

Were you on the highway?

BLONDIE

I was in the passing lane.

MARGE

If your insurance company ever finds out, you are food.

BLONDIE

I passed a truck.

BRUCE

Makes you wonder where he was.

MARGE

The power he must have.

BRUCE

That he could talk you through, so you didn't—

MARGE

Like a witch doctor. Did you hear chanting?

BLONDIE

Crash?

BRUCE

Yes.

MARGE

(tests out the idea)

Exhilarating.

BLONDIE

Like jumping out of a plane at ten-thousand feet—so I'm told. I'd never skydive—seeing yourself fall like that.

BRUCE

Maybe you should do it blindfolded.

BLONDIE

(warms to the idea)

Maybe. Yes, I'll have to try—

MARGE

How do we find Rufus?

BLONDIE

He'll find you.

BRUCE

What does he look like?

BLONDIE

I can't say.

Can't or won't? **BRUCE**

He wore a mask. **BLONDIE**

Sometimes you can kind of see through— **MARGE**

Not this mask. It was heavy. I couldn't even make out the outline of his face. He was backlit. And itchy. He was scratching all the time. **BLONDIE**

Rufus scratched? **BRUCE**

Maybe it wasn't the mask. Maybe he had a rash. Maybe he's disfigured. Maybe— **MARGE**

I have to go. **BLONDIE**

But you just got here. **MARGE**

What's the word then? **BRUCE**

What word? **BLONDIE**

The message. **BRUCE**

There was no message. **BLONDIE**

No?! **MARGE and BRUCE**

MARGE

No message? He goes through all this trouble to direct you, blindfolded, to a Seven-Eleven, passing people on the interstate, then tells you to find us in Nevada. How did you find us at a rest stop in Northern Nevada? And you come all the way down here with nothing to tell us when you get here. What did you think you'd do when you found us?

BLONDIE

He thought I needed the drive. He said I wasn't having enough fun, and I should go for a ride.

MARGE

To find us at a rest stop in Northern Nevada?

BLONDIE

Wherever. I don't think where I went was important.

MARGE

But he sent you to us, to tell us that he sent you, with no message.

BLONDIE

He did mention he was waiting for Bruce.

MARGE

For Bruce?

BLONDIE

Is a mention a message?

(to Marge)

Don't worry. I'm sure he's waiting for you, too.

BRUCE

He said he was "waiting for Bruce?"

BLONDIE

He was chewing a sandwich. I thought he said moose.

BRUCE

Moose or Bruce?

BLONDIE

He said he was hungry. I really think he said "waiting for moose." For ten years. The store had a "Beware of Moose" sign. That seems like a long time.

BRUCE
So he's not waiting for me?

BLONDIE
He might be. I don't know if—

BRUCE
He didn't say "waiting for Bruce" at all?

BLONDIE
Maybe. I have to go.

BRUCE
What are we supposed to do?

BLONDIE
I have no idea.

(Blondie starts to walk away.)

MARGE
You drove blindfolded all the way down here for fun?

BLONDIE
(shakes her head)
I have to watch how much I do that. All that concentrating gives me a headache.
(to Marge)
But why not for fun?

(Blondie exits.)

BRUCE
Duck!

MARGE
Milk? I didn't see—

BRUCE
No. I want her to think we're gone.

MARGE
Why would she care? She's leaving.

BRUCE
In case she looks back.

Why would she?

MARGE

Lot's wife did.

BRUCE

(Bruce crawls in Blondie's direction. Beat. Marge joins him in crawling.)

I don't want her to see us following her.

MARGE

Is that why we're crawling? So she won't see us?

BRUCE

We're crawling to our car.

MARGE

The VW is on the other side of the parking lot.

BRUCE

Hurry! She's getting away.

MARGE

We'll never make it.

BRUCE

Crawl faster.

MARGE

My knees hurt.

BRUCE

She's escaping.

MARGE

I can't crawl faster. If I'd known I'd be crawling, I would've worn kneepads.

BRUCE

How attached were you to the hammer?

MARGE

What?

BRUCE

The hammer. Did you love it?

MARGE

It's a hammer, not a hamster. I didn't even know it was under the seat.

BRUCE

There's a Regal.

MARGE

A regal what?

BRUCE

A Buick. We wouldn't have to crawl so far.

MARGE

You want to steal a Buick?

BRUCE

I hate to leave the VW.

(Marge stops crawling.)

MARGE

I am not stealing another car.

(Marge tries to stand, but Bruce pulls her down. They struggle.)

BRUCE

By the time we get to the VW, she'll be long gone.

MARGE

I have flashbacks about stealing the VW. I wake up sweating.

BRUCE

If we lose her now, we'll never find Rufus.

MARGE

But she said *he'd* find *us*.

BRUCE

She's getting in her car!

MARGE

I'm not letting you suck me in again.

BRUCE

She's your lifeline. You want that new life? If she leaves—

But— **MARGE**

BRUCE
If she leaves, it's goodbye Rufus, hello police. Or milk.

(Beat. Marge crawls with renewed effort.)

MARGE
The VW isn't a hundred percent. It clunks.

BRUCE
It's a coffin on wheels. The Regal's our only chance.

MARGE
(pulls him along)
Crawl faster.

BRUCE
Let's try to enjoy this.

MARGE
We're not doing this for fun.

BRUCE
Doesn't mean we can't have any. Come on—take that first step.

MARGE
We'll have fun in the car.

BRUCE
You promise?

(Marge nods.)
This is great. I'm so proud of you.

(Marge exits to an invisible car.)

MARGE (off)
How do we hot-wire this thing?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 5

(An hour later, outside a mini-mart in Nevada near the Idaho border.)

MARGE

Why do I have to go in alone?

BRUCE

If we're together, she'll recognize us.

MARGE

If I go in by myself, she'll recognize *me*.

BRUCE

Not with this.

(Bruce produces a wig.)

I only have one.

MARGE

Then *you* use it.

BRUCE

Mini-marts don't take to me.

MARGE

I don't even know why I'm going in here.

BRUCE

Because I'd like a Coke. And buy yourself something too.

(Bruce hands Marge a roll of quarters.)

Sorry—need to get rid of some change.

MARGE

All these quarters—I'm sure I could just use a few and call home. Mini-marts always have payphones.

BRUCE

We're on the Idaho border.

MARGE

Still in Nevada.

BRUCE

But practically in Idaho, and you still sound like you're in California driving the carpool.

MARGE

It's not my turn today.

BRUCE

It doesn't have to be your turn ever.

MARGE

Still, if I'd known this was coming, I could have prepared. I could have packed.

BRUCE

Marge, you had a suitcase.

MARGE

Yes, but I wasn't prepared for . . . this.

(beat)

I really miss my suitcase.

BRUCE

You left it in the first car. The one before the VW.

MARGE

Oh.

(beat)

What kind was that? What model?

BRUCE

Does it matter?

(beat)

I forget. It wasn't memorable.

MARGE

It clunked.

BRUCE

Yes.

(shakes his head)

Gone now. I try to forget about them, in case I'm ever caught. I think I'm strong, but I don't know if I could stand up to torture.

MARGE

Torture?

BRUCE

I couldn't even tell you if it was a big car or a small car.

MARGE

That's remarkable.

BRUCE

The VW'll be gone in a few more hours.

(beat)

It may seem drastic, but I see it as an incredible opportunity. Don't want to remember stealing a car, don't. Don't want to be a California soccer Mom? Forget you were one.

MARGE

Just forget it all?

BRUCE

Those were the old rules. Make new ones. I dare you.

(Bruce exits. Marge puts on the wig as Blondie enters with a counter. Lights reveal a dairy case upstage. Marge walks to the case, pulls out a small milk and drinks.)

BLONDIE

Are you going to pay for that?

MARGE

Of course. I was just so thirsty.

BLONDIE

Some people don't. Lives get ruined. Children cry.

MARGE

Do you work here?

BLONDIE

No. That'll be fifty-nine cents for the milk. Will there be anything else?

MARGE

A Coke.

BLONDIE

Next to the dairy case. Help yourself.

(Marge breaks the roll of quarters and pays Blondie.)

Excuse me.

(Blondie steps into her reporter persona as the actor who played Jackie, wearing a bathrobe and holding a martini, enters as MARGE'S HUSBAND.)

I'm in Tokyo with Bull Ballmoth, the husband Margaret Nancy Reagan Ballmoth abandoned while he was on an extended business trip.

(Beat. Marge puts down the Coke, rearranges the milk in the dairy case and picks up her Coke.)

MARGE'S HUSBAND

I feel used.

BLONDIE

What about the children?

MARGE'S HUSBAND

I'd love to go back and help them out, but if I did, I'd be enabling Marge.

(Exit Marge.)

BLONDIE

Thank you for shopping!

(Exit Marge's Husband and Blondie, who pushes off the counter. Enter Bruce. Pause. Enter Marge with the Coke, which she drinks.)

BRUCE

Where's my Coke?

MARGE

This is your Coke.

BRUCE

You drank it.

MARGE

Some of it.

BRUCE

Why did you do that?

MARGE

Why not? Rearranged any dairy cases lately?

BRUCE

I never go near dairy cases. I've never gone near dairy cases. I hate dairy. How could you think—

MARGE
I have.

BRUCE
You have?

MARGE
I rearranged the dairy case. If you rotate everything to the right—maybe to the left too—something looks missing. I wish I could be there to see her panic and count the cartons.

BRUCE
Was it—

MARGE
Exhilarating.

BRUCE
They were at your mercy.

MARGE
Yes. It felt so good.

BRUCE
(beat)
I'm having an idea. Think back to the rest stop.

MARGE
The rest stop. When we stole the . . . car.

BRUCE
That's the one. We got a message from Rufus.

MARGE
You think he really said Bruce and not moose?

BRUCE
I don't know, but that's not it.

MARGE
Then there was no message. She said there was no message.

BRUCE
That's the genius of it. An obvious message could have been intercepted. So he hid it. Remember, the man was a secret agent.

MARGE

He was?

BRUCE

Before he went over to the other side.

MARGE

When—

BRUCE

Nobody knows for sure. But they say he dropped out of the CIA or FBI or national security something ten years ago. There was an . . . incident. Something about a faded blue uniform. Or maybe not.

MARGE

So where did he hide our message?

BRUCE

It was inherent in our situation. He didn't want to burden us—burden you—with all of that responsibility. All those directions to follow. He just wants you to do your own thing. Like you did in the mini-mart. He's challenging you to turn the road to Montana into one mini-mart after another. Bigger and bigger mini-marts. Or bigger and smaller mini-marts. It'll be chaos. We'll completely sabotage the milk infrastructure, and we won't stop until we've brought the enemy to their knees.

MARGE

All I did was rearrange one dairy case.

BRUCE

One small step for Marge, one giant leap—

(Blondie enters. Marge and Bruce duck.)

BLONDIE

Help! Milk robbers!

(The lights flicker as Blondie switches into reporter mode and Bruce and Marge exit.)

Police are now saying that the incident at Bob's Borderline Mini-Mart was merely a malicious prank. Luckily, there was no Son of Sam today. On that note, the now-legendary carton of milk was declared legally drunk this morning and a memorial plaque was dedicated at the dairy farm that produced it.

(Bruce and Marge, without the wig, enter and watch Blondie, who exits. Lights dim.)

SCENE 6

(The lights should come back up full almost immediately after the end of Scene 5. Later that day in Idaho, near the Montana border. Bruce watches something offstage from the front seat of the Regal. SIRENS blare periodically as appropriate.)

BRUCE

Three alarms. That's impressive.

MARGE

She's still in there?

BRUCE

It takes a while to get your hair done. You should know.

MARGE

Why?

BRUCE

I assumed you—

MARGE

I was always driving the carpool. Or coming back from the carpool. Or running errands while he was off screwing his secretary. Sorry—administrative assistant.

BRUCE

(beat)

Tell me about the movie theater.

MARGE

It was—

BRUCE

Oh look: another fire truck. Sorry. Go on.

MARGE

It was already dark. They were showing previews. I used a family of latecomers as cover and yelled "fire." It was amazing. People actually ran screaming toward the exits.

BRUCE

That's the way it was for me.

MARGE

You yelled "fire"?

BRUCE

A long time ago. I don't remember much about it. I remember it was fun.

MARGE

Exhilarating.

BRUCE

I told my mother.

MARGE

Like driving blindfolded.

BRUCE

She said she wouldn't live under the same roof with someone who would do that. I call her in Florida once a year to see if she's died.

MARGE

The only thing that annoys me is that some young punk with green hair used it as an excuse to set a real fire.

BRUCE

(beat)

You could get your hair done.

MARGE

When?

BRUCE

Whenever you want.

MARGE

I can't exactly go into that hairdresser's—not while she's in there. "Hi, fancy meeting you at a hairdresser's on the Idaho-Montana border."

BRUCE

Someone said that to me once. Almost. I think it was "Hi, fancy meeting you at a Kosher butcher shop on the Idaho-Montana border." I never crossed that border. I've never been to Montana. They say the sky goes on forever.

MARGE

It's the "Big Sky" state.

BRUCE

Wide open. No speed limits. No telling what I could do. It's power. Respect that power, Marge. It transforms you. Another fire truck.

MARGE

That theater is going to burn to the ground. She's coming out.

(They duck.)

Why is she getting her hair done *now*?

BRUCE

Wants to look good for Rufus is my guess.

MARGE

Do you think they're involved?

BRUCE

Hard to say.

(Bruce peeks out, then sits up and starts the car.
They drive. Marge points at an imaginary sign.)

MARGE

"Entering Montana."

(beat)

I have to tell you something.

(pause)

On my way back from the theater, I stopped in that diner—the one with the really loud sign. Told all the customers I would no longer cook for them—loudly. People stopped eating. They stopped talking. I could feel the energy—half the room was ready to applaud.

BRUCE

And then?

MARGE

I walked out.

(beat)

I still feel the buzz. I feel Montana. I hear Rufus in my mind.

(Bruce hears something.)

BRUCE

Did you hear that?

What? **MARGE**

A clunk. **BRUCE**

I think we went over something. **MARGE**

There it is again. **BRUCE**

Maybe it's truck debris. **MARGE**

No—it's definitely a clunk. Next time we stop, let's see what's available. **BRUCE**

You want to steal another car? **MARGE**

I'd like to start the shopping process. A good car doesn't always fall into your lap. **BRUCE**

The car runs fine. **MARGE**

For now. She's turning. **BRUCE**

I see it. **MARGE**

Jesus—it's a dairy farm. **BRUCE**

What if she's . . . **MARGE**

One of them? **BRUCE**

What if she never saw Rufus? We just took her word for it. What if it's a trap? **MARGE**

BRUCE

She's turning into the driveway—

MARGE

And pulling the newspaper from the box. Bruce!

BRUCE

Get a hold of yourself. She could still be on our side.

MARGE

What if she isn't? What if she knew we'd follow her?

BRUCE

Get down.

MARGE

I don't see anyone.

BRUCE

Cows—on the ridge. Little collars with cameras. I'd bet money on it.

MARGE

(beat)

You told me not to imagine a milk truck around every corner, and you're putting cameras on cows? I think we're losing it.

BRUCE

I've seen it done.

(beat)

Something smells very funny about this farm.

MARGE

Rubber.

BRUCE

What?

MARGE

You were right: burning rubber. It's coming from our car. The Regal's on its last legs.

BRUCE

I told you, once the clunk starts . . .

What do we do? **MARGE**

Kill the engine. **BRUCE**

What if it won't restart? **MARGE**

Then we'll hike back to the main road and carjack somebody—the Regal had a forty-four under the driver's seat. **BRUCE**

All these violent people. **MARGE**

Not the America we grew up in. **BRUCE**

We should stay. **MARGE**
(beat)

It's milk city, Marge. If we stay, this could be the final battle. **BRUCE**

Nancy Reagan was always good in a fight. **MARGE**

You may want to forget your children's names. Just in case. **BRUCE**

I have no children. **MARGE**

You didn't like them much anyway. **BRUCE**

Who? **MARGE**

Right. Look sharp. **BRUCE**

MARGE

(beat)

I feel . . . something.

BRUCE

Something . . . ?

MARGE

This might not be a real dairy farm.

BRUCE

What about the cows?

MARGE

A front.

BRUCE

For?

MARGE

Rufus.

(Blackout.)

Want to read the rest? To receive a complete reading copy, and for other contact information, please return to the "Milk and Cookies" information page (click your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://singlelane.com/proplay/milkandcookies.html>).