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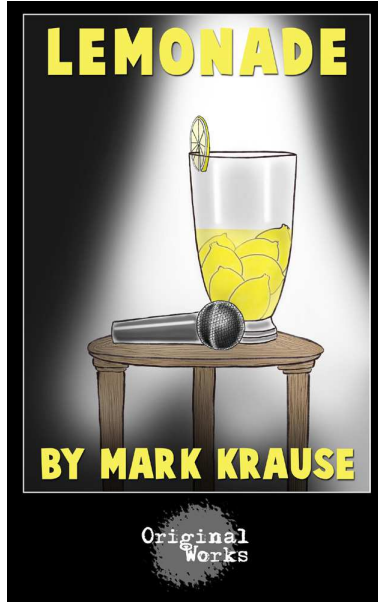
CHEESE

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LEMONADE by Mark Krause

Synopsis: Ever hear the one about the struggling comedian and his artist wife who sculpts garbage? All they want is a piece of the American dream. Instead, they're about to lose everything. For the kids' sake they've tried to keep the laughs coming. Will this little family make it? It's going to come down to the final punch line.

Cast Size: 3 Males, 3 Females



CHEESE

A pungent new comedy

by Laurel Ollstein

CHEESE received it's first production in 1999 at The Actors' Gang, Los Angeles, CA. It was directed by Brian Powell. The cast was as follows:

JESSE	Bradley Warden
CINDY	Stephanie Erb
BILLIE	Ilene Kristen
GRIFFIN	Marshal McCabe
CHRIS	C.J. Orthal
ROSY & JUDE	Tracey Perwin
MAMIE	Sharon Madden

The Characters

Jesse – 16-year-old boy - from a family with a lot of secrets – he is just trying to be ‘normal’. Not experienced with women.

Cindy - 25 and ages to 40 – Earthy – sweet – loves children. Raised in Beverly Hills but moved to Tillamook. Her 6-month-old son died and she is in complete denial and carries around a doll in his place.

Billie – 25 and ages to 40 – struggling actress – pushy and a little angry. Raised in Beverly Hills – still lives there. Cindy is her best friend. Billie slept with Griff (Cindy’s husband) two months ago on his visit to LA – she is pregnant – no one knows.

Griffin - married to Cindy – 25 and ages to 40. Pot smoker – cheese sculptor. Good guy. Trying to survive – dealing with the grief of the death of his child in his own way.

Chris - 20ish and ages to 40ish – a quiet man, wants to be a writer. Chris is a woman who lives as a man, feels that she was born in the wrong body. No one knows this.

Mamie – a Beverly Hills Jewish mother – never tells her age. In her youth she was wild and very promiscuous, now trying to make up for her past by being clingy and intrusive.

Rosy – 16ish – white trash – loves boys. Born and raised in Tillamook.

Jude – 16ish – Jewish American Princess bad girl combo – lives in Beverly Hills – wants to be an actress.

** Rosy and Jude can be played by the same actress.*

The Set

One set: A rustic cabin in Tillamook, Oregon. A main living area and part of the kitchen can be seen. Outside the front door there is a small tree house.

CHEESE

SCENE 1

In the land of cheese

(In the dark theatre a young boys voice is heard as he enters from the audience)

JESSE: What the FUCK?!

(A spot light on Jesse – a sixteen year old boy in crisis. He stumbles onto the stage shaking his head in disbelief when he notices the audience)

JESSE: Sorry. Sorry. Hi There. Uh. Yeah. Wow. Hi. *(He calms down a bit)* My name is Jesse. By the way. Hi.

(He looks over the audience)

JESSE: Let me run something by you. You know your own story, right? We all have one. How we came to be who we are? Those basic things everyone knows. BUT what if you think maybe you aren't who you are. OR you didn't get to where you got how you thought?! My head is spinning. My entire life might just be a lie. I need to think this through. I need to watch it. And you're watching it with me-- As long as you're here. Got it? I need witnesses. Take notes. Okay? Starting from – the beginning. My beginning. Tillamook.

(Lights up on a small wooden house in Tillamook, Oregon.)

In every conceivable place there are carvings - orange in color. There is a bear, with a fish in his mouth that has the words Tillamook carved in it - an eagle - an unfinished

haunted house - and a shapely naked woman. And many others.

On the table is a plate of cheese, in slices.

It is raining.

Jesse is watching from the edge of the stage as CINDY, an earthy pretty twenty-two years old enters. She is wearing a baby pack on her in the front. She looks in, smiles and goo goo's to the baby a bit. She goes to the table and folds the laundry of baby clothes.

JESSE: Tillamook, Oregon the land of cheese, trees and ocean breeze. 44 hundred people – 55 thousand cows. *(He stops to think of what to say next a cow is heard off stage)* This is where I began. I think. Well, in the story I was told anyway. This is where I start. So let's just see shall we. Let's watch. Tillamook.

(He sniffs the air.)

JESSE: Smell it? Cheese. Everything in my family is about cheese in one way or another. I'll be back. You'll have questions.

(Jesse walks back into the audience and sits down to watch with everyone else.

Meanwhile on stage - Cindy looks as if she hears something, and walks calmly toward the front door. BILLIE a twenty-something bleach blond comes running up to the front door carrying a Gelson's bag, just as Cindy opens the door.

Billie looks like she is about to throw up. Cindy takes the bag from Billie and guides her into the house. She smiles as she points off stage toward the bathroom.)

CINDY: First door on the right.

(Billie looks somewhat confused but takes the direction nonetheless. Billie runs off stage and disappears into the bathroom. Cindy calls after her.)

CINDY: I threw up the whole first trimester. You should try a little pot, helps.

(Violent coughing off stage.)

CINDY: Can I hold your hair or something? What's in the bag, can I look?

(She looks.)

CINDY: Aren't you sweet, bagels and salami. Oh, my, god, is that our cucumber mask? My skin has missed you.

(Billie re-enters, wipes her mouth with a piece of toilet paper and stands very still looking at Cindy. Cindy eats some cheese and fixes the table again.)

BILLIE: I don't understand.

CINDY: Cheese?

(Cindy offers her a plate of cheese. Billie gags.)

BILLIE: No. Hello! Aren't you surprised to see me? How could you have known I was coming? I didn't know I was coming.

CINDY: Griff and I were just talking about you this morning. You know when you talk about someone, and they're in your mind, and you aren't surprised when they call out of the blue. Cause I think we're all connected somehow. In our thoughts. Well, the people who listen to thoughts that is. And the people who you've known all your life. Like you. Let me look at you. *(She takes a good look at Billie)* Oh, you are so beautiful.

BILLIE: And you are. . too . . oh, Cindy, I am so sorry.

(Billie hugs Cindy. Cindy pulls back quickly.)

CINDY: Don't! You'll squish Jesse. And what are you sorry about? Look at you. Oh, Bill, it's been too long. Seven years. How did we let it go that long? Honey, you're looking a little too Beverly Hills. But we'll knock that right out of ya, here in the "Land of cheese, trees and ocean breeze". You wear that pregnancy well, though.

BILLIE: All right, wait a minute! Wait one fucking minute! How did you know that I was pregnant?

CINDY: I can smell a pregnant woman an aisle away in the grocery store. Don't you want to see Jesse?

(Billie jumps back horrified.)

BILLIE: No!

CINDY: Come on, don't be afraid, you'll have one of your own soon. Peek in. He's asleep right now. Isn't he beautiful?

(Billie looks in and stares in shocked silence.)

CINDY: Well?

BILLIE: Well behaved.

CINDY: No trouble at all.

BILLIE: I'll bet.

CINDY: Look at the little toes and fingers and precious ears. Those ears. I can't get enough of them. I dream about them. Like little apricots. Smell him.

BILLIE: No, that's okay.

CINDY: *(a bit demanding)* Smell him.

BILLIE: *(She does)* Smells a little...moldy?

CINDY: Probably time to change that diaper.

BILLIE: Oh. Right. Of course. That would be the thing – for a child – of that age – to need – a diaper change and...oh...

CINDY: You want' give it a whirl?

BILLIE: No, thanks.

CINDY: Now as to your baby, we won't even talk about who the father is, if you don't want.

BILLIE: Okay. What's that smell?

CINDY: You get used to it when you have your little guy.

BILLIE: No. It's that.

(Billie points to the plate of cheese on the table.)

CINDY: Smoky cheddar?

(Billie gags.)

BILLIE: The sound of it makes me nauseous.

CINDY: Did you eat a good breakfast? Gotta eat a good breakfast. Eating for two...

BILLIE: Ohhhh! Look if I had wanted advice on how to live my life I would have stayed at my mothers.

CINDY: Are you living with Mamie?

BILLIE: Only because I'm broke.

CINDY: Every acting career has a lull.

BILLIE: Having a lull implies that at one time there was no lull.

CINDY: I'm glad you and Mamie have become friends finally.

BILLIE: We haven't. She wants relief from her guilt - and I don't know what the hell I'm doing with my life.

CINDY: How's that workin' out?

BILLIE: Not so hot. The stepfather died. Note - I think she fucked him to death. Mamie's become the opposite of the inappropriate mother she once was. Now she's the textbook version of an intrusive Jewish mother. I don't know which is worse.

(Pause)

BILLIE: At least your mom was consistent. Oh, that was awful of me. I'm sorry Cind – so much grief, so much.

(Cindy waves her away.)

CINDY: Sorry for what? My mom?

BILLIE: Well, yeah – she – died?

CINDY: Died. Yup. She did.

BILLIE: You weren't at the funeral, so I didn't...

CINDY: She was sick for a longtime.

BILLIE: Yup.

CINDY: The natural order of things.

BILLIE: Right.

CINDY: Parents die.

BILLIE: Yeah.

CINDY: Jesse was teething. Crying all the time...thought it best not to travel. Sent Griff. He needed to get out of the forest for a while. Nice you went. How was it?

BILLIE: Good. For a funeral.

CINDY: She never understood my not having a career and just wanting a family.

BILLIE: You were a weird kid for Beverly Hills. All those quilts you made from found fabric in the alleys behind Brooks Brothers, and filling your mom's pantry with (*she gags*) pickled beets.

CINDY: You always accepted me.

BILLIE: My sister of choice.

CINDY: Yeah. I'm just sorry Mom never got to meet Jesse.

BILLIE: Yeah. Well, now they can?

CINDY: What?

(*Billie gags.*)

CINDY: I'll put the cheese away.

(*Cindy gets up with the cheese tray and puts it in the kitchen, munching a few more pieces on the way. Billie is looking around the house - sniffing.*)

BILLIE: What's with these statues?

(*A small female figure, ROSY, is seen outside in the darkness. As Billie and Cindy continue to talk, the dark figure stalks the outside of the house, unseen by Billie or Cindy, peering in the windows and popping back into hiding in the bush.*)

(*The phone rings. Cindy calls from the kitchen.*)

CINDY: You answer it.

(Billie looks at the phone - it rings louder.)

BILLIE: Did that just get louder? *(it gets even louder)*
Okay- OKAY! *(Billie picks up the phone)* Hello.

(The voice of MAMIE is heard as an almost God like presence. Billie and Mamie always talk almost on top of each other.)

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* Billie!

BILLIE: Mamie!

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* You have no idea how many people I have called looking for you. I need to know where you are – at all times!

BILLIE: Why? I didn't know where you were my whole senior year of high school.

CINDY: *(to Billie)* Don't be mean.

BILLIE: *(to Cindy)* It's in my blood.

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* Who the hell goes to Tillamook Oregon in the winter? Or the summer for that matter. Is there anything there besides cheese?

BILLIE: Gotta go, going on a tour of the cheese factory!

(Billie hangs up.)

CINDY: Does she know you're pregnant?

(Billie shoots her a look.)

BILLIE: No! Hence my escape before she willed it out of me. She would love that - give her something to do.

CINDY: So let her.

BILLIE: No. *(pause)* God, I am a horrible person.

CINDY: *(very matter of fact)* No, you are not, you're just human. We hold things in long enough they become putrid.

(Billie holds up her hand and looks at the phone.)

BILLIE: She never calls only once. Wait for it...

(The phone rings. Billie picks it up.)

BILLIE: What?!

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* Do you love me?

BILLIE: What do you want, Mamie?

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* Bring me back a wheel of sharp cheddar from the factory. I love their cheddar.

(Billie hangs up.)

CINDY: What did she want?

BILLIE: To drive me crazy. I wish she'd find some inappropriate men to sleep with - like in the old days. Men who would take her on long trips to Vegas. I miss those days.

CINDY: And you could show up at my doorstep with your suitcase, and I would fix us hot chocolate, with my home made marshmallows. Hey, do you want some now? I have some.

BILLIE: You still make them?

CINDY: Of course. Jesse loves them!

(Cindy runs into the kitchen.)

BILLIE: Oh dear. I should be taking care of you.

CINDY: Sit down and relax. You know me. I am happiest when I am mothering everyone.

(Billie gets up and walks around the house looking out the window.

Rosy is outside looking right back at her.

Billie looks out the window. At first she thinks it's a dull mirror.

For a moment Rosy and Billie mirror each other, but as soon as Rosy moves differently Billie screams. Rosy laughs and ducks back down behind a bush.)

BILLIE: Who is that? What the... did you see that? What is going on here!

CINDY: Just the slutty girl next door. Rosy. She babysits sometimes.

BILLIE: She what?

(Slight pause)

CINDY: She has a crush on Chris and she...well, there's no nice way to put it. She wants to get in his pants.

(Rosy's face appears again. Cindy yells toward the window.)

CINDY: Chris isn't home, sweetie. Go on now. Go to work.

(She turns to Billie.)

CINDY: Works at the Dairy Queen, I don't let her baby-sit any more. She lies like a rug. I tell ya, everything out of her mouth. Can't believe a word. See that sculpture. Her.

(Cindy points to the sculpture of the naked woman.)

CINDY: She wanted it done that way. She tried to get in Griffin's pants. Griffin's not interested, NOT interested in that sort of THING. So now it's Chris. I swear, I hate to think bad of anyone. But I think she just wants to get pregnant, so someone has to marry her. She's only sixteen. She's just looking for a family. I guess.

BILLIE: Who's Chris?

CINDY: Rents the tree house.

(pause)

BILLIE: Have you guys been taking a lot of hallucinogens?

CINDY: God no. I haven't done that since high school - with you. Throwing up peyote in your garage. Remember? And we told Mamie it was the shrimp from dinner.

BILLIE: And she went down to the market to complain - and ended up going to bed with the manager in the stock room.

CINDY: And your stepfather found them.

BILLIE: Divorce number two...or was that three? Hey, so... rents the tree house? Who is this guy?

CINDY: We needed the money. And Chris just sort of showed up one day. He works at the cheese factory - who doesn't. But there's something sweet and vulnerable about him. Melts my heart. Feels good having him around. And Griff needs a friend. Gets kinda isolated here.

BILLIE: I'll bet. *(Billie gets a whiff of cheese and gags)* I swear to god I cannot stand that SMELL!

CINDY: Try a saltine. I'll get it...

(Cindy starts to get up but Billie stops her.)

BILLIE: No, let me.

CINDY: You don't know where anything is.

BILLIE: That never stopped me before.

(Billie gets up and goes into the kitchen as Cindy continues talking.)

CINDY: You know when I was pregnant I could eat anything. I loved being pregnant. Can't wait to do it again. I am gonna be big as a house soon. Just like all the other moms here. They start havin' kids and they just expand. I LOVE that. Women are proud to have hips here. It's all I ever wanted. All I ever wanted.

(Billie comes out of the kitchen holding a pistol by the nose.)

BILLIE: Why do you have this?

(Cindy takes the gun away from Billie.)

CINDY: Oh, don't look so horrified. We live in the wilderness, you just never know.

BILLIE: What? Wild piece of Gouda?

CINDY: Never know.

(Cindy still has the gun in her hand.)

BILLIE: I shouldn't have come. I don't know what I was thinking. I should just drive myself to the nearest Planned Parenthood and be done with it.

(Without thinking Cindy walks toward Billie with the gun still in her hand.)

CINDY: NO! You are not going to...

BILLIE: You don't need this.

CINDY: You are staying right here! I want you here.

(Cindy is now pointing the gun right at Billie – without meaning to. Billie notices.)

BILLIE: Um...Cind.

CINDY: Oh my, this isn't safe. *(Cindy puts the gun away in the kitchen and continues talking.)* Don't you remember how much we dreamed of this? Being moms. We'd practice with our dolls, and your three-legged dog, Gus.

BILLIE: You dreamed of it, sweetie. Not me. I just played along to hang out with you. Didn't you know that?

CINDY: Really?

BILLIE: Of course. You know how much I love you. You are my family of choice, girl. I don't have the skills to be a mother. I can't even get cast as one.

CINDY: Don't be so hard on yourself. Of course you'd be a good mother. Those casting people don't know what they're talking about. Hey, just tell me what the father looked like?

BILLIE: What?

CINDY: I remember your last boyfriend - that I met anyway. What was his name...uh...Amish was his name, right? Indian, wasn't he? You two would have made beautiful babies. I think the more variety in a human, the better they look. Ya, know? And the healthier – like mutts. We don't tend to pass on the ugly family traits if we mix it up more, Right?

BILLIE: It's not...Amish's.

(Pause)

CINDY: Griffin'll be happy to see you. It's been...two months at least since he saw you down in L.A..

BILLIE: Yeah.

CINDY: Two months?

BILLIE: Yeah, right.

CINDY: I'm so glad you're here. I've been thinking about you.

BILLIE: I'm just so sorry I wasn't here sooner.

CINDY: Don't be silly. You're here just in time.

BILLIE: Cindy. Talk to me.

CINDY: Well ...we are. Aren't we?

BILLIE: I mean really talk.

(Billie sits Cindy down at the table. They look at each other for one quiet moment - then Cindy pops up.)

CINDY: But not right this second. I gotta go to work. We can pick up right where we left off - later. We have time! We- have- time. So don't you dare leave. I'm touched you came. I don't have many friends up here, ya know. I don't know why, but I stick to myself lately. I need to get out more. *(pause)* Truthfully, I hope you stay forever. At least till the baby's born.

Wouldn't that be fun?! We could raise them together. Oh, Billie, what a great idea that would be. They would be like cousins.

BILLY: Yeah. Interesting anyway.

(Billie looks around at the sculptures.)

BILLY: You know these really are remarkable, the details are amazing. I had no idea that Griff was so good with his hands.

(Billie walks over to the Rosy sculpture and looks closer.)

BILLIE: What are the little red flecks in Rosy?

CINDY: That one's made out of jalapeno cheddar.

BILLIE: What?

CINDY: They're made out of cheese.

BILLIE: All of them??

CINDY: Yep.

BILLIE: Don't they mold?

(She smells one and starts to gag.)

CINDY: Eventually. They're temporary art. Like ice. Meant to be appreciated only for the brief moment that it exists on earth - then it's gone.

BILLIE: Ohhh. Like the chopped liver sculptures at the Brentwood Country Club. I always wondered who made those. Does Griff sell these?

CINDY: The exec's at the cheese factory love 'em. These are all for the Cheese Ball tomorrow night. Let me give you the tour...

(She points to the naked sculpture of Rosy.)

CINDY: Rosy here is made out of jalapeno cheddar, which gives it that nice marbleized quality.

(She walks over and points at the bear.)

CINDY: Bear here, my personal fav, is made out of mild cheddar. That's easiest to sculpt with, so Griff uses it a lot.

(She points at the haunted house.)

CINDY: We're havin' a little Muenster melt down with the haunted house here. And...

(She walks over to eagle.)

**(Other statues can be used and lines added for the tour – ex. A sharp cheddar Clown – a Laurel and Hardy – Colby and Jack)*

CINDY: Eagle is of course alllll American!

(GRIFFIN bursts in - tall and good looking in a rough sort of way.)

GRIFFIN: Hey baby...

(He picks up Cindy from behind and dances with her. Then just as abruptly he puts her down gets a beer and sits and glances up at Billie.)

GRIFFIN: Billie.

BILLIE: Griffin.

(Short pause - Griff smiles at Billie and then turns to Cindy.)

GRIFFIN: Chris here?

CINDY: Not yet. *(pause)* Isn't it great to see Billie? Oh, well, you saw her in L.A. It's great for me. How was work, honey? We missed you. Didn't we Jesse? Miss Daddy.

(Griff goo-goos at the baby and unzips the pack. He takes out a baby sized DOLL – everyone on stage freezes. Jesse walks on from the audience and into the scene – he looks at the doll and then at the audience)

JESSE: Whaaat? I'm – a – doll?

(He walks slowly back to his seat in the audience – they unfreeze on stage)

GRIFFIN: They're talkin' lay-offs for winter again.

CINDY: Well, I better not be late then. Billie, whatever is mine is yours. Eat - sleep - throw up - sleep with my husband if it makes you feel good. We're for that, right Griff? Right – Griff? Do what makes you feel good. Do what you have to do. To survive.

(Griff and Billie look at Cindy, not each other.)

GRIFFIN: Right. Right, honey. Do what you need to do. That's how we roll up here. You look beautiful today, Cind. Every day.

CINDY: How did I get so lucky to find you? Billie, we'll talk tomorrow. You'll be asleep when I come home. *(She takes off the baby pack and hands it carefully to Griffin.)* Here's my little... you be good honey child - you be good to your daddy.

GRIFFIN: He always is.

(Griff takes the pack and puts it on.

Cindy gives him a kiss. Gives Billie a kiss, and exits.

Billie watches Griff.

Griff watches Billie and drinks his beer.)

GRIFFIN: Beer?

BILLIE: No, I don't think I should.

GRIFFIN: Reef? I got a big fatty rolled up.

BILLIE: No, thanks. *(pause)* Griff?

GRIFFIN: Yeah?

BILLIE: You're wearing the pack?

GRIFFIN: Cindy likes me to.

BILLIE: She's at work now for uh eight hours, isn't she?

GRIFFIN: Yep.

BILLIE: I see. I see. . .no, I don't. But who am I to say anything.

GRIFFIN: That's right.

BILLIE: IT'S A DOLL! *(no reaction from Griff)* Maybe I'll have that beer.

(She gets a beer - they sit in silence drinking.)

GRIFFIN: How's the acting career?

BILLIE: Humiliating. How's the cheese business?

GRIFFIN: Shouldn't a come.

BILLIE: I'm startin' to realize that.

GRIFFIN: Why did ya?

BILLIE: I'm pregnant.

(Slight pause)

GRIFFIN: Really shouldn't have come.

BILLIE: Should I leave?

GRIFFIN: Too late.

(silence)

GRIFFIN: Sure you don't want any reef? Use ta make Cind feel better when she was preggers. Don't think it hurts the kid any. It's life that sobers us up. Help the little guy out, keep him high as long as possible.

BILLIE: You should have told me about Cindy.

GRIFFIN: Did.

BILLIE: You said she was having a difficult time!

GRIFFIN: Is.

BILLIE: That's putting it rather mildly, don't you think?
She says she wants to have another baby.

GRIFFIN: Can't. Plumbing's broken.

(pause)

Whose baby you havin'?

BILLIE: Not completely sure.

(Long pause)

GRIFFIN: You sure you don't want some reef?

(Griff gets up and goes to the kitchen and finds the bag of Beverly Hills items. He takes out the salami as Billie talks.)

BILLIE: Um. . .well... I didn't mean to come. Sounds silly, but I didn't. I started driving up the coast and just kept going. Once I hit the Oregon boarder I figured it was meant to be. I don't want anything from you Griff. I...I'm just havin' a hard time too, I guess. I feel like I have no place to go. I found out I was pregnant, and I haven't worked, and I moved in with my mother. And that's crazy. I started thinking about Cind, and felt terrible. I needed to see her and ...

(Billy giggles uncomfortably.)

GRIFF: Well, I'm going to go change now.

BILLIE: Okey dokey.

(Griffin takes his beer and the salami and exits. Billie lets out a breath.)

She drinks - the phone rings - she looks around - it rings louder. She picks it up.)

BILLIE: *(to the phone)* How do you do that?

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* You're mad at me.

BILLIE: No. I am not mad at you, Ma. What do you want?!

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* It's raining up there, you don't even have a raincoat. *(pause)* I called the Oregon weather bureau.

(She hangs up - the phone rings again - louder - Billie gags and exits to the bathroom.)

The phone continues to ring louder each ring.

CHRIS, twenty something guy, cute, wearing baggy clothes – a little nervous - enters the house. He looks at the ringing phone - it rings louder.

Chris doesn't want to answer it, but it is so loud he is forced to.)

CHRIS: What?

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* You see, you got a cold already.

CHRIS: I don't think so.

MAMIE: (V.O.) Who am I talking to?

CHRIS: Chris.

MAMIE: (V.O.) You cute?

CHRIS: I don't know.

MAMIE: (V.O.) You sound cute. What do you do for a living?

CHRIS: Cheese factory.

MAMIE: (V.O.) Age?

CHRIS: Twenty.

MAMIE: (V.O.) Married?

CHRIS: No.

MAMIE: (V.O.) Have you ever been in a long relationship?

CHRIS: Well . . .ah....

MAMIE: (V.O.) Have you seen my daughter Billie? She's cute. Take a look.

(Billie enters – Chris looks at her.)

MAMIE: (V.O.) Are you tall sweetheart? You sound tall.

BILLIE: *(To Chris)* I'm not here.

CHRIS: *(To Mamie)* She's not here.

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* Do you know where she is?

BILLIE: *(To Chris)* Don't know where.

CHRIS: *(To Mamie)* Don't know where.

BILLIE: *(To Chris)* Hang up.

CHRIS: *(To Billie)* Hang up?

MAMIE: *(V.O.)* Hang up?

(Chris hangs up the phone)

BILLIE: Thanks. You take direction well, Chris?

CHRIS: I must be.

(They look at each other a beat.)

BILLIE: You look like a Chris - I guess. I'm Cindy and Griffin's old friend.

CHRIS: Billie. Your mother ...was trying to fix us up, I think.

BILLIE: Yeah, well. She does that. She doesn't want me to end up a lesbian.

(Billie checks out Chris and likes what she sees.)

CHRIS: Maybe I'll have a soda and sit here for a spell. If you don't mind?

BILLIE: No. Stay. Please. It's too quiet here. I'm not used to it.

(Chris gets himself a soda - Billie watches him.)

CHRIS: So, uh where you hail from? Somewhere loud?

BILLIE: L.A.

CHRIS: Loud enough. I was from there, a long time ago.

BILLIE: Really. I'm surprised.

CHRIS: Why?

BILLIE: I don't know - you don't seem like the L.A. type.
(laughs) Whatever the hell that is. That's a stupid thing to say.

CHRIS: No, you're right, it wasn't me. L.A., I can safely say - you wouldn't have recognized me there.

BILLIE: Is Tillamook you?

CHRIS: I don't know yet. And you? You look lost.

BILLIE: You're perceptive.

CHRIS: Nah. I just been lost a lot. I recognize the look.

BILLIE: Oh, uh.....Rosy *(She points to the naked cheese sculpture.)* was here to see you too.

CHRIS: Oh.

BILLIE: You're blushing. How cute is that.

(Chris turns away embarrassed.)

CHRIS: Yeah, well.

BILLIE: Have you known Griff and Cindy a long time?

CHRIS: Long enough.

BILLIE: Has Cindy been like this since.. ?

CHRIS: Since he died.

BILLIE: She should see a doctor.

CHRIS: What's a doctor gonna say? She can't deal with the truth? Who can?

BILLIE: It's a doll! She carries around a fucking doll and treats it like her son!

CHRIS: You don't understand. It was horrible -- unacceptable. No one should have to deal with that. He just didn't wake up. He was in the pack all day with Cindy goin' around town. He was sleepin', and then, and then he just stopped breathing. No explanation. No dramatic exit, he just breathed out and didn't breathe in again. Cindy didn't know right away.

BILLIE: Oh, my, god.

(Billie holds her stomach)

CHRIS: Then in the grocery store, in the middle of the produce section, she realized he was dead. She freaked out. To put it mildly. Wouldn't let any one touch him. Griffin was called at work, and she just decided right

then that Jesse wasn't dead - he was asleep. So she kept carrying him around. Well, now, that wouldn't do. I mean - he was dead. Eventually, his body would...decompose.

BILLIE: Oh my god.

CHRIS: So, Griffin played along and said he would baby-sit. He buried Jesse. Put a doll in his place. She never said a word about it.

BILLIE: How could they... how could he go along...?

CHRIS: What else could they do? How do you go on after something like that? How do you get up in the morning and choose your cereal. You gotta make up a new story. An acceptable one. People do it all the time. Your family stops talking to you because they say what you are disgusts them. And you say - no - it's cause they're stupid. And that works - you can feel sorry for them. And then you can get up in the morning and eat your coco puffs.

(They sit in silence while Billie absorbs this.)

BILLIE: Do you think I should have an abortion?

CHRIS: Why ask me?

BILLIE: You seem to - be so sure of yourself. *(pause)*
And you have such beautiful skin.

CHRIS: It's hereditary. Everything looks good on the surface in my family, ya know? But don't you believe it, cause underneath it's all black heads and pus.

BILLIE: Lovely.

(They sit and look at each other. Billie can't quite figure him out and wants to.)

(Griff comes barreling in.)

GRIFFIN: Chris! You coming out to the tree house?

CHRIS: I was chattin' with Billie here. Had a hard day on the line - thought I'd chill before hittin' the cheese. What are you all excited about?

GRIFFIN: The baby. Great! Excellent work, my man. I saw it on the way out this morning.

(Griff walks out as abruptly as he came in. Chris gets up to leave as Billie stops him.)

BILLIE: What baby?

CHRIS: A sculpture of Jessie.

BILLIE: In cheese?

CHRIS: It's been really hard on Griff. He's been doing this for Cindy. I don't think he's been about to - I don't know - grieve how he needs to. I keep trying to write something about Jesse but...

BILLIE: You a writer?

CHRIS: The only way you're entitled to call yourself a writer is if you actually write. I think about it. So, no. I'm a cheese sculptor.

BILLIE: The baby?

CHRIS: Griff was starting to forget what he looked like. So, I whipped it up last night out of a hunk of mild cheddar. I was kinda hoping he would think it was magic. But I'm afraid Griff isn't a believer.

BILLIE: Are you?

CHRIS: A believer of magic?

BILLIE: Yeah.

CHRIS: I think you have to make your own. You?

(Chris gives her a long look.)

BILLIE: I always wanted to believe in Santa Claus but I'm Jewish. Story of my life.

(The phone starts to ring. Billie scowls at it.)

BILLIE: But you see? I ask for a miracle and I get...

(The phone rings louder - Chris exits.)

Billie goes to the couch and flops down, puts a pillow over her head as the phone continues to ring louder and louder.)

SCENE 2
The tree house

(Rosy is hiding in the tree house – waiting for Chris.

Chris starts to climb up the ladder.)

CHRIS: Griff? Where are ya...?

ROSY: Hey, I was awaitin' for you....hunky.

(Rosy practically jumps Chris.)

CHRIS: Oh, geez, whatya you doing up here, Rosy? Go to work.

ROSY: Whhhyyy?

CHRIS: Rosy. Don't you have to go? Come on, you don't want to get in trouble, you know how mad Melvin gets when you're late.

ROSY: Okay. But I'll pose for you any time k? Don't you want to kiss me?

CHRIS: No.

ROSY: Don't you think I'm pretty?

CHRIS: Of course you are.

(She kisses him - Chris pushes her off.)

CHRIS: Stop it Rosy. Don't you want to do more with your life than fuck in the back seat of cars?

(She thinks about it.)

ROSY: Like?

(She grabs Chris between the legs. Chris jumps.)

CHRIS: Don't do that!

(Rosy steps back - a little surprised. She smiles.)

ROSY: Come on – I'll pose now. If you wanna I like when you look at me. You got good eyes. You know?

CHRIS: Thanks.

ROSY: No, they're like – different – than when I don't know – like when Melvin looks at me. Eww. Or Bobby or Jake or any of those fuckwads. You – I don't even havta' take my clothes off. You are looking right through my t-shirt. Right down my pants. I feel it. It's cool. I can feel your hands on me. Your rough hands...

CHRIS: Stop it! Really.

ROSY: Oh, okay. You're no fun. I can make you feel real good.

CHRIS: I'm fine the way I am.

ROSY: Are ya?

CHRIS: Yes.

ROSY: I'll see you tomorrow night.

CHRIS: What? Why?

ROSY: I'm babysitting. Easiest babysitting job in town.
Jesse is a – doll. (*she laughs*)

CHRIS: I thought Cindy wouldn't let you any more.

ROSY: I'll talk her into it. I need the bucks, They need the
time alone. And – so – do – we.
I'll bring you back a Dilly bar.

*(Griff has been watching this from the tree house and as
Rosy runs off Griff starts to laugh)*

*Chris climbs up to the tree house. They both take seats in
the tree house. They're silent for a moment.)*

CHRIS: Anything to eat up here man?

GRIFFIN: Nothin' but cheese...oh, wait... (*Griff holds up
a salami.*) And kosher. Billie, bless her little Beverly
Hills hide. (*Griff looks at Chris – Chris is not making
eye contact with Griff.*) Can I sculpt you?

CHRIS: Sure I guess.

GRIFFIN: Let's see... (*holds up a hunk of cheese in his
hand.*) Swiss.

CHRIS: You sayin' I got holes in my personality?

GRIFFIN: Watch yourself, my man. That Rosy's jail
bait, you know.

CHRIS: She sure is.

GRIFFIN: Yep.

CHRIS: Nothing's gonna happen, believe me.

GRIFFIN: Sometimes it doesn't have to happen to make people think it happened. Looks are everything. Ya know?

CHRIS: Oh, I know.

(Griff takes a bite of the salami.)

GRIFFIN: You and Billie looked cozy.

CHRIS: I like her. I think I miss that LA crazy in spite of myself.

(Griff looks at the salami.)

GRIFFIN: I miss sex.

CHRIS: It's still around I hear.

GRIFFIN: Not in my bed.

CHRIS: Have an affair.

GRIFFIN: Shit. Affair? "Have an affair." What a word. Makes it sound like Cary Grant or something. All tuxedos and martinis. Which it isn't. It's cheating. It's lying to yourself and the person you love the most. It shouldn't be called an affair. Fuck.

CHRIS: It's called that too.

(Griff suddenly smashes a piece of cheese on the table in a violent burst - Chris watches)

GRIFF: Damn it!

CHRIS: What happened in L.A.?

GRIFFIN: My mother-in-law's funeral. Too many people are dying.

CHRIS: They keep doing that.

GRIFFIN: Ran into Billie, too.

CHRIS: Slept with her, didn't you?

GRIFFIN: The only thing that's real is the cheese, sculpting it into something beautiful.

CHRIS: You're a good artist, Griff. Why don't you use something more permanent?

GRIFFIN: Everything's temporary. Why pretend it isn't?

(Griff takes the cloth off of the sculpture, revealing a beautiful cheese sculpture of Jesse. A bust of a baby age six months old. Griff and Chris look at it.)

GRIFFIN: You did a good job, man.

CHRIS: It was magic.

GRIFFIN: Right. I'm gonna show this to Cind. Maybe...we can have a conversation. Maybe she's ready to...

(He doesn't finish the thought, instead he pulls out a joint from his pocket and starts to light it – he offers it to Chris)

CHRIS: I'm going to go get me a pop.

(Chris walks over and hugs Griff, who hugs back. Chris kisses the top of Griff's head, sweetly. For a moment Griff melts into it. And then suddenly pulls back and looks at Chris. Pause. Chris exits. Lights fade.)

SCENE 3
The baby

(Lights up in the living room.

Billie is still on the couch with the pillow covering her head. Suddenly she sits up.)

BILLIE: Ahhhhhhh!! I am so sick of it!!

(She hits her stomach hard.

Throws herself on the floor - gets up - and throws herself down again. She does violent sit-ups.

Chris enters and grabs her from behind trying to stop the violent outburst.)

CHRIS: Hey.

BILLIE: What?! Where the hell did you come from?

CHRIS: Hellva time for exercise.

(Billie doesn't stop – Chris holds her down.)

BILLIE: You don't understand. There's been a terrible mistake.

CHRIS: I know just how you feel.

BILLIE: No you don't. You don't have any fucking idea how I feel. What a stupid thing to say. You know how I feel? You know how I feel? This wasn't supposed to happen.

(Billie collapses on the floor.)

CHRIS: I understand feeling like a mistake has been made.

(Billie stops - she sits up.)

CHRIS: Change it.

BILLIE: What is that suppose to mean?

CHRIS: Change the truth. Make up a story and believe it. In time so will everyone else.

BILLIE: Like Cindy?

CHRIS: Well, yeah.

BILLIE: She's crazy. I am sorry. I love her, but she's crazy. And eventually she is going to have to deal with it.

CHRIS: When she's ready. Let me ask you something. How would you like things to be right now?

(Billie sits up and thinks.)

BILLIE: Well, Santa Claus, I guess I would rather that I wasn't pregnant.

CHRIS: You could do something about that. What else?

BILLIE: Oh, just a stocking stuffer? Let's see...

(She closes her eyes.)

BILLIE: Be a different person. That's what I'd like - to be a completely different person.

CHRIS: What kinda person?

BILLIE: This is stupid.

CHRIS: Come on.

BILLIE: The kind of person who could have a good relationship. The kinda person who could fall in love. And have it stay. To make a family with to...(pause) You know what's funny? I used to want to be Cindy. Even when she was a kid, she always seemed happy. I wanted that to rub off on me. Cindy always knew she wanted kids. To be a mom. That was enough for her. She's a better mother to that doll than most kids get. Me? I'd...forget it one day in a shopping cart.

CHRIS: What about the father? Does he care what happens?

BILLIE: There's one example of my high moral standards - the father. It could be one of several.

CHRIS: Griff one of those?

BILLIE: He would be my pick. Aren't I a piece a work?

CHRIS: You both needed comfort, in my guess.

BILLIE: And look what that led to? No good deed goes unpunished.

CHRIS: It was a moment that happened. Can't reverse it - can't live for it. It's a moment. Like right now is a moment. (*He snaps his fingers.*) And now it's gone.

(Billie looks at Chris who looks very appealing to her in the moment. Billie kisses Chris and then pulls away and starts talking fast.)

BILLIE: Mamie would love me to be pregnant under just about any circumstance. For her to gloat about with all the other Beverly Hills grandmothers at the Country club. Spoon feeding them from a chopped liver dolphin center piece. She just wouldn't mention the fact that the father is an ex-drug dealer married to my oldest best friend. And her daughter is lost and sometimes suicidal. No. She'd just make up some nice story about me being an actress between roles and my absent workaholic husbands' import export business keeps him out of town a lot. And she'd even end up believing it.

CHRIS: That's right.

(pause)

BILLIE: I wish I could hand Cindy my insides.

CHRIS: You could do that.

BILLIE: What? Just replace the doll with a baby? She wouldn't notice?

CHRIS: I don't know. Maybe. Why not? Who's to say that would be the wrong thing to do? Maybe it's what should happen.

BILLIE: You have very kind eyes. Any one ever tell you that?

CHRIS: Twice today, actually. An you have great – everything. Anyone ever tell you that?

(Chris kisses her. They both pull away. They look at each other wanting more - both surprised. Cindy enters just as Chris and Billie are about to jump each other. The moment breaks.)

CINDY: I decided not to go to work. I had a bad feeling.

BILLIE: You feel sick?

CINDY: No. I had a feeling you wouldn't be here when I got back. And I couldn't handle that. This whole thing is giving me a bad feeling in my stomach...I...

(Billie stands up moving away from Chris.)

BILLIE: Look - why don't you forget I was here at all. Okay. Both of you.

CHRIS: No.

BILLIE: I am nothing but trouble. Believe me. Always was. Remember, Cindy? Everyone else tried shoplifting as a kid. Me? Arrested.

CHRIS: *(laughs)* Me too.

BILLIE: Really?

(Chris nods and smiles. Billie smiles.)

CINDY: You shouldn't leave. You two are just getting to know each other. And I want to know...your baby.

(Billie looks at Cindy and then back at Chris.)

BILLIE: I can't. I can't just merrily have this kid. I can't, Cindy. Even for you. I'm sorry. And I'm really sorry Chris...bad timing I guess. Yet another story of my life.

(Cindy goes into the kitchen)

BILLIE: I have to go. I have to...

(Cindy picks up the gun from the shelf and points it at Billie.)

CINDY: You are not getting an abortion. I won't allow it.

(Billie steps back toward the door.)

BILLIE: I shouldn't have come here.

CINDY: But you did.

BILLIE: I'm so sorry.

CINDY: You will not kill that child.

BILLIE: Well, gee, Cin, don't you think the kid might suffer, just a little, if you shoot me?

CINDY: You're right. *(pause)* I'll shoot him.

(Cindy points the gun at Chris.)

CINDY: I will sacrifice Chris for your baby...I will.

(They all stay perfectly still.)

CHRIS: Shit. Do I have any say in this?

BILLIE: Cindy, this is crazy. Come on.

CINDY: Stay away. You will have this baby. Or I will kill Chris.

(Griff enters carrying the Jesse sculpture.)

GRIFFIN: What's up...whoaaa. Cindy?

CINDY: She was going to have an abortion, Griff.

GRIFFIN: Well...but...ah, give me the gun.

(Cindy pulls away from Griff.)

CINDY: You're siding with them? Is that it now?

GRIFFIN: Let her go...

CINDY: If you see someone about to commit murder don't you think you should stop them?

GRIFFIN: That's what I'm trying to do, honey.

CHRIS: Can I say something?

CINDY & GRIFFIN: NO!

CHRIS: Okay.

BILLIE: Do you want this baby. Is that it?

CINDY: I want that baby to live.

(Griffin walks over to her and quietly tries to hold her.)

CINDY: You get away from me. Sit over there...go on all of you.

(They all sit on the couch, not taking their eyes off of Cindy. There is a long pause as Cindy holds the gun on them. They freeze – Jesse walks on from the audience)

JESSE: I really don't know what to do with this. I'm having a panic attack. I need a drink? *(he starts to leave the stage)* Take good notes. I uh...oh...

(Jesse exits through the front door of the set – all on stage unfreeze)

CHRIS: How far along are ya?

BILLIE: Eight weeks.

CHRIS: It's gonna be a long seven months.

CINDY: Shut up!

(Griff gets up.)

CINDY: Sit down!

(Griff sits down.)

GRIFFIN: Chris' right. You can't just keep us here until Billie delivers.

CINDY: Watch me.

(Cindy holds the gun on them in silence.)

BILLIE: Cind, let's talk about this baby. Okay?

CINDY: Nothing to say. Just...give birth.

BILLIE: Is that what you want?

CINDY: Um...yes!

BILLIE: Cindy, don't you want to know who the father is?

GRIFFIN: Not a good idea.

CINDY: Yes. I would like to know.

BILLIE: I'll give you this baby, is that what you want? Is it really? Jus put the gun down.

CINDY: I don't believe you.

GRIFFIN: Cindy, honey... something happened tonight that, uh, you should know.

CINDY: What?

GRIFFIN: A sign, a sign from Jesse.

CINDY: What? Where is Jesse? Why aren't you wearing the pack?

GRIFFIN: Look.

(Chris and Griff give each other a glance. Griff puts down the sculpture and takes off the cover - Cindy gasps.)

CINDY: Griff, it's... incredible.

(Griff takes the idea and runs with it.)