

**Switchback** or  
**Lost Child in the Terror  
Zone**

*A Jazz Operetta by Murray Mednick*

*Switchback* was first produced at the 1994 Padua Hills Playwrights Festival/Workshop under the author's direction, with the following cast:

**Rita:** Sharron Shayne-Simeone

**Brenda:** Robin Karfo

**C.C.:** Mark Fite

*The remaining two characters were added in a subsequent draft.*

## **Characters**

**Tony** *A young street prince; 25; dressed in white.*

**Rita** *His mother; 40s; good-looking, hip, shell-shocked.*

**Brenda** *Girlfriend of Tony's; 20s; beautiful, high-strung, street-wise; dressed to look like a boy.*

**C.C.** *Street warrior; late 20s, early 30s; known as the Preacher; dressed in army fatigues.*

**Sheila** *Girlfriend of Tony's and C.C.'s; late 20s; sleek.*

*The interior of a building partially destroyed by artillery fire; this is presently a neutral area in the Terror Zone. Maybe it was once a health club, as there is a swimming pool behind the audience. The stage rear wall has a hole in it, or a large window, revealing a switchback walkway. The switchback could be built onstage, be an image to scale, or a videotape so as to depict C.C.'s entrance and the finale. The baby carriage is of the old-fashioned type. The plane is to scale—a toy model guided from offstage—or video. Down right is a bench; on it, sitting quietly, all in white, is TONY. GUNFIRE. RITA rushes in with the baby carriage, as BRENDA enters from the opposite direction on a bicycle.*

**Brenda** He tried to run me over! He doesn't even know me! I am meat! I am garbage!

*GUNFIRE.*

I am fun! Fun target! Fun! Fun to shoot!

*GUNFIRE. SHOUTS off.*

You bag! You fart! You maniac! I hope you die!

**Rita** Quiet!

**Brenda** I coulda been killed! Me!

**Rita** Shut up, Brenda!

*GUNFIRE stops.*

**Brenda** This was a safe neighborhood!

**Rita** You look like a boy now!

**Brenda** Do I resemble Tony?

**Rita** You look just like him!

**Brenda** There's water in the pool!

**Rita** Oh!

**Brenda** Is this the place?

**Rita** This is the place!

**Brenda** There's water in the pool!

**Rita** This is it!

**Brenda** Who said?

**Rita** C.C.!

**Brenda** Okay! Where is he?

**Rita** He's on his way. (*Looks off*) That must be he!

**Brenda** Do I resemble Tony?

**Rita** What I say? (*Looks off*) C.C.! He's coming in—here he comes!

**Brenda** Who is this guy?

**Rita** You know C.C.

**Brenda** What's C.C.?

**Rita** Curtis Craig, or Craig Curtis.

**Brenda** How can he?

**Rita** He can cross boundaries, he.

**Brenda** Say how?

**Rita** He has connections on the other side.

*A PLANE appears.*

**Rita** That be he!  
**Brenda** Up there?  
**Rita** That far perspective!  
**Brenda** You know him?  
**Rita** Yeah.  
**Brenda** Way when?  
**Rita** Before.  
**Brenda** Say who?

*The PLANE circles.*

**Rita** I said.  
**Brenda** Say what?  
**Rita** Tony's friend. A dearest boy. A bosom pal. A companion.  
You know him well. They call him Preacher.  
**Brenda** A drug dealer and a pimp. Say?  
**Rita** I would say.  
**Brenda** Okay. When do we run?  
**Rita** 7:30.  
**Brenda** And the baby?  
**Rita** Baby, too.  
**Brenda** Baby, too.  
**Rita** Act right.  
**Brenda** Say where?  
**Rita** Right here. Try to relax. And don't start confessing.  
**Brenda** "Don't start confessing!"  
**Rita** He's coming in! There he is!

*An orange PARACHUTE appears in the sky. The PLANE makes a pass or two and flies off.*

**Brenda** Let's step on it! Squash him!

**Rita** Here he comes!

**Brenda** Is that him?

**Rita** What I say?

*Enter C.C., folding an orange parachute, wearing army fatigues, a portable phone, and a .45. He throws the parachute aside.*

**C.C.** Greetings on a good day!

**Brenda** Good night, sir!

**C.C.** Surprised.

**Brenda** Pleased, sir.

**Rita** Be joined.

*C.C. and BRENDA perform an elaborate handshake.*

Grateful. Happy.

**C.C.** I bring wishes for child.

**Rita** Thoughtful.

**Brenda** Poignant. And now?

*C.C. pops BRENDA on the nose.*

**C.C.** Whim. *(Broad smile)* Fantastic.

*BRENDA falls away to compose herself as C.C. speaks into his portable phone.*

Poolside. 7:35. Smacked Brenda. Hello?

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, find BRENDA joining TONY.*

**Brenda** You ever use? You used, didn't ya?

**Tony** What?

**Brenda** You. You used.

**Tony** Yeah, I'm clean now.

**Brenda** Hey, what do I care? When?

**Tony** I'm cleaned up now. I don't do nothin'.

**Brenda** When?

**Tony** Before.

**Brenda** Hey, who hasn't used? Crack?

**Tony** I don't do nothin' now, not me.

**Brenda** Crack?

**Tony** Hey, fuck that shit. I drive a cab. I got the word. Fuck that shit.

**Brenda** In school?

**Tony** Who went to school? I went to jail. I went to jail school. I got reformed.

**Brenda** The word?

**Tony** I got the message. I got the news.

**Brenda** Say?

**Tony** I was fourteen at the time, maybe fifteen. I told nobody.

**Brenda** Say?

**Tony** Who wants to say something? Who wants to know? People talk too much.

**Brenda** You don't wanna kill nobody, either.

**Tony** I take precautions. I watch myself.

**Brenda** Are you sick?

**Tony** I'm only twenty-four, but I feel like I'm aging. I'm not escaping like I thought I would. I drive my cab. I eat good. I watch myself. I could get on TV. Then maybe I could say something.

**Brenda** Are you sick?

**Tony** I feel great. I feel fine. People in a session, in the joint, everybody is trying to look like they're listening, but all they wanna do is talk their shit, they gotta listen to their own shit. Now I go to groups, I go for counseling, it's the same, I could hear myself.

**Brenda** You wanna see me ever?

*END FLASHBACK.*

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* I gave you the goods. You got the goods. The count is right. No. The count is not short. The count is right. Excuse me? *(Clicks off)*

**Rita** *(Big breath)* Ah. *(Rocks baby carriage)*

**C.C.** *(Of BRENDA)* She can't go.

**Rita** No?

**C.C.** Just you.

**Rita** And the baby?

**C.C.** No. Kid stays, Brenda stays, you go.

**Rita** Say?

**C.C.** Price baby.

**Rita** Say?

**C.C.** They.

**Rita** Who?

**C.C.** Other side.

**Rita** That's not what you said.

**C.C.** What I say?

**Rita** Family go!

**C.C.** No deal. Only you.

**Rita** No!

**C.C.** Tony had a lady on the other side. Sheila. You know Sheila?

**Rita** I don't know no Sheila.

**C.C.** She liked Tony.

**Rita** So?

**C.C.** She wants his child.

**Rita** Why?

**C.C.** Love and retribution.

**Rita** Love? Retribution?

**C.C.** My word is my deed.

**Rita** Say?

**C.C.** Exactly 8:15. Remember, 8:15. Only you. You alone. 8:15.

**Rita** Alone?

**Brenda** *(Crossing)* Apologize!

**C.C.** *(Laughing)* I'm sorry.

**Brenda** *(As TONY, with big strut)* Drop dead you cunt-suckin' fuck!

**C.C.** Fine.

**Rita** *(Of BRENDA)* That's Tony!

**Brenda** *(As TONY)* I hope you eat shit for the rest of your life, you punk!

**C.C.** Keep talking dirt. See what good it brings you.

**Rita** Shut it, Tony! Brenda!

**Brenda** *(As TONY)* I hope you drown!

**C.C.** *(To RITA)* Okay, that's enough from him.

**Rita** Time out, Bren'.

**Brenda** *(To C.C., as TONY)* Hey! How come you got walk-about money and others don't? Are you smarter?

**C.C.** I am.

**Brenda** *(As TONY, big strut)* They may bleed! *(Of the phone)* And them things is killing machines! Am I right? They eat blood!

**C.C.** They are clean machines. And they don't breed.

**Brenda** I said bleed!

**C.C.** An' they don't eat.

**Brenda** *(As TONY)* Them money machines is fed on blood, sir.

**C.C.** They are electrical machines, boy. Electro-mathematical.

**Brenda** *(As TONY)* No! Why you walk about with money while we get only chits?

**Rita** Stop it, Brenda! Tony!

**Brenda** *(To RITA)* How can he?

**Rita** He gets views. He gets satellite info-mation.

**C.C.** One hand washes the other.

**Brenda** *(To C.C.)* Explain!

**C.C.** I'm a warrior businessman, me. I'm the Captain of Swords, the Commander. One of you I'll spare and save from grief.

**Brenda** Explain!

**C.C.** People need different things. One needs this, the other that. I give you something, you give something back.

**Brenda** Example!

**C.C.** Some people have nothing. You're one of them.

**Brenda** I have a child! I have a baby!

**C.C.** You're mental, Brenda.

**Brenda** *(As TONY)* Don't say that, you dumb fuck!

**C.C.** I'll have you shot. Are you ready?

**Brenda** Shoot!

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* You see the little one with the hat? Yeah, that one. *(Pause)* Shoot him.

**Brenda** Okay, I'm sorry!  
**C.C.** *(Into phone)* Hold your fire. But keep an eye on them.  
Thank you. *(Walks away, singing)*

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, find TONY and SHEILA.*

**Sheila** What you got, Guy?  
**Tony** What you got, Girl?  
**Sheila** I don't have.  
**Tony** I got something.  
**Sheila** It's hard these days, crossing over.  
**Tony** I got something nice.  
**Sheila** I can't cross over.  
**Tony** I got Colombia Red. I got buds and flowers.  
**Sheila** Oh, how good!  
**Tony** Came through the line today!  
**Sheila** Oh, how fine!  
**Tony** Not much, but some.  
**Sheila** Wanna trick me for it?  
**Tony** Say?  
**Sheila** Are you deaf?  
**Tony** I'm not deaf.  
**Sheila** Wanna trick me for it?  
**Tony** I can't right now.  
**Sheila** No? *(Laughs)*  
**Tony** Next time, maybe.  
**Sheila** You give me the goods?  
**Tony** I got no problem with that.  
**Sheila** Then we'll see next time. How I feel.  
**Tony** You like poetry?

**Sheila** You silly boy.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**C.C.** *(Beckons to BRENDA)* Come here, girl.

**Brenda** *(Aside, to RITA)* I'll try. *(Goes to him)*

**C.C.** What I do is, I take me an area and I develop a market, a demand. I set up supply and distribution. I study the laws, the procedures. The police. I guard my turf and I watch my back. It's hard work.

**Brenda** Are there bodyguards? Are there dogs?

**C.C.** Yes. And I have an army, too. Me!

**Brenda** Okay, I forgive you. What's your racket?

**C.C.** I have soldiers. I have a crew. I have dependents, I have clientele. I love it. I'm the Man, they come to me. Be a business, and I'm the power. Be research and development. Be psychology, be marketing.

**Rita** Good mood.

**C.C.** Be oratory. Be preachery.

**Brenda** You're a fucking gangstah!

**C.C.** I've gone to a great deal of trouble on behalf of this lady here.

**Brenda** Why?

**C.C.** Because of Tony, who was a friend of mine. Now gone.

**Brenda** Now gone!

**C.C.** *(Charging her)* Blame?

**Brenda** *(Quickly)* No blame!

**C.C.** Who the fuck do you think you are?

**Brenda** Do I remind you of someone?

**C.C.** Yeah.

**Brenda** Who?

**C.C.** Tony.

**Brenda** Ha! I am BRENDA!

**C.C.** No shit. I knew you once, and you're still a head case.  
*(Walks away)*

**Brenda** Hey, Curtis!

**C.C.** Craig.

**Brenda** Hey, Craig! *(Pointing)* You live over there now? Other side?

**C.C.** Where else could I be the Man? And earn five thousand dollars a day?

**Brenda** *(To RITA)* He makes forty million dollars a year!

**Rita** We get chits. Chits is all we get.

**Brenda** Chits and bullets and a fast death.

**Rita** There are too many people and they must eat. An absolute horror. Are we worms? I look at virtual reality, I see worms sliding, giving expressions, thrusting their noses into the camera. Are we worms?

**C.C.** Worm-like, I'd say.

**Brenda** "There are the working poor and the very poor, which is us. We are the left behind, we. Plus fire, flood, quake, and riot."

**C.C.** Such is nature, girl.

**Brenda** What I say?

**Rita** *(To C.C.)* Do you like parks and pools?

**C.C.** What time is it?

**Rita** Say?

**C.C.** I like parks and pools. *(Tries to grab baby, foiled by RITA)*

**Brenda** Kidnapping? Baby stealing?

**Rita** Shut up, Tony/Brenda.

**Brenda** *(To C.C.)* What's your business there, Curtis?

**C.C.** There are extraterrestrial substances, be always in demand. They are the coca, the poppy, and the tobacco. The opium

poppy is a funny-looking blue plant from another planet. Some places here it grows like a weed. Not from earth. Strong. Addictive. Invest. Now for earth substances. They are alcohol, coffee, wheat, hemp, and water. Invest.

**Rita** Alcohol?

**C.C.** Invest.

**Rita** Water?

**C.C.** Invest.

**Rita** Extraterrestrial?

**Brenda** Police?

**C.C.** We got a system here, they don't want to talk to anyone who knows. You have to start with the leaders. We're strictly into supply and demand. It's like we got one economy on Mars and another in the neighborhood. Nobody wants to talk about real things. They'd have to see themselves in it all.

**Brenda** Police?

**C.C.** The police know. But what are the police gonna do? They throw one guy away and ten more are lined up to fill the hole. They're locked into a vicious game, goin' nowhere. No winners, no losers. Police suffer.

**Brenda** Can I go to the bathroom?

**C.C.** And they'd have to face my private army. And shit has to move. Police got to eat, too. *(Into phone)* Don't fire. Remember, gentlemen, I have my army. And they are waiting. And they are watching. And they are nasty. *(Clicks off. To BRENDA)* Go take a leak.

**Brenda** Thank you. *(Leaves)*

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, BRENDA discovers TONY.*

**Brenda** Tony!

**Tony** Yo!

**Brenda** What you doin' here, boy?

**Tony** I'm movin' in wit' you.

**Brenda** Say?

**Tony** You gonna be my girlfriend. I'm tired of hanging here by myself. You're a little strange—but who am I, right? I'm off the streets, and I should have a home. Am I right?

**Brenda** Marry me?

**Tony** Later we'll get married. Now we'll have an apartment. Me and you. You won't have to worry.

**Brenda** Oh!

**Tony** I'll take care. You make it nice. I'll drive, I'll bring home the goods. One thing only...you gotta stay on them head pills, B.

**Brenda** I know that. Sex?

**Tony** I take precautions. I watch myself.

**Brenda** Family?

**Tony** Don't go so fast.

**Brenda** Will you die, Tony?

**Tony** Not me.

**Brenda** Tony?

**Tony** Not me.

**Brenda** Oh!

**Tony** Don't worry about it, B. I'm feeling fucking great.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**Rita** What was on earth before?

**C.C.** I was not here before.

**Rita** Where were you, C.C.?

**C.C.** I was unborn.

**Rita** How old are you? We were *all* unborn! There's fifty-four billion more unborn than born! Are we talking the transmigration of souls here? Where are all the fucking people coming from if they weren't here before, if you're talking transmigration of souls? And if they were here before, where were they?

**C.C.** So I don't know.

**Rita** How did they get here?

**C.C.** What time it is?

**Rita** Them drugs!

**C.C.** Through the sky. So. You get life and freedom. A home. Safety. They get the kid.

**Rita** Not mine.

**C.C.** Let go.

**Rita** Oh, no.

**C.C.** Do it for me, Rita.

**Rita** Why? I hardly know you, you!

**C.C.** I watched over your son, Tony. We did time. And he was a pal of mine.

**Rita** You weren't there!

**C.C.** (*Manipulative*) I'm interested in you. I care about you. I feel a deep rapport. I'd like to save you before you come to grief.

**Rita** Bullshit. You flew in here to steal the child. For the other side!

**C.C.** Not true, darling. (*As TONY, with strut*) This is the last time, Mom. I promise. I swear to God, that's it. I'm gonna clean up and go away to another country. Mom? Death goes where I go, Mom. Death is inside of me. It is dormant, it is waiting. I'm trying, Mom. I love you, Mom. I'll make friends with death.

**Rita** Tony! And Brenda?

**C.C.** (As TONY) She's trying, Mom. (*Walks away*)

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, find TONY and SHEILA.*

**Sheila** You crossed.

**Tony** Here I am.

**Sheila** What you bring me, boy?

**Tony** I got words. (*Recites*) "I hate and love. And if you should ask how I can do both, I couldn't say; but I feel it, and it shivers me."

**Sheila** Hate and love.

**Tony** Catullus. He was a Roman.

**Sheila** Nasty boy.

**Tony** He'd put his mouth on anything.

**Sheila** I'll slap you.

**Tony** They killed your friend, Terry.

**Sheila** C.C.?

**Tony** They caught him crossing over to your side. C.C. had to put a bullet in his head.

**Sheila** Dirty dog!

**Tony** He had a good time.

**Sheila** Watch out.

**Tony** He likes you.

**Sheila** C.C.

**Tony** He likes you.

**Sheila** He'll never fuck me. (*She shivers*)

**Tony** Are you cold?

**Sheila** No. Where I come from, it's cold. This is not cold. Where I come from, this time of year, it's cold. You wanna get inside?

**Tony** Yeah.  
**Sheila** Trick me?  
**Tony** Where?  
**Sheila** Inside. Over there.  
**Tony** You don't owe me.  
**Sheila** Life's too short, and death is sudden.  
**Tony** You want revenge?  
**Sheila** Why? You offering?  
**Tony** I'm asking.  
**Sheila** Not today.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**C.C.** I cared about the cunning little sonofabitch.  
**Brenda** *(Re-entering)* Yo, Rita!  
**C.C.** *(Aside to BRENDA)* I was hoping you fell in.  
**Brenda** "Darling!" *(Holding out a hand)* Give us money! Shake it out! All we get here is chits!  
**Rita** And bullets.  
**C.C.** Money is not free.  
**Brenda** How much?  
**C.C.** Twenty-two.  
**Brenda** That's high.  
**Rita** That's high.  
**C.C.** That's tough.  
**Rita** Okay.  
**Brenda** Have a heart, you cheap oaf.  
**Rita** Money for the road! Money for the journey!  
**C.C.** Leave the child? Leave the baby?  
**Brenda & Rita** No!

**C.C.** Forget about it.  
**Brenda** Interest rate's too high. Twenty-two is high.  
**C.C.** Yes, it is.  
**Rita** Let's try and forget about it.  
**Brenda** If the rate was frozen, I could go along with it.  
**C.C.** Market forces decide the rate.  
**Rita** Then what's to keep the Asians back?  
**C.C.** The army. What I say. (*Walks*)

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, TONY and SHEILA.*

**Tony** I heard you did time.  
**Sheila** C.C. told you?  
**Tony** Yeah. What?  
**Sheila** Screaming and crying.  
**Tony** Trade?  
**Sheila** Yeah. I saw the money and it was not real. Scared?  
**Tony** Not me.  
**Sheila** You wanna do something?  
**Tony** We can do things.  
**Sheila** First you have a girl over there? Other side? Brenda?  
**Tony** We two have an apartment.  
**Sheila** How nice for you.  
**Tony** I could be big. Disks and tapes. MTV.  
**Sheila** Money is shit, Sigmund Freud.  
**Tony** Who?  
**Sheila** You don't know?  
**Tony** I heard of him.  
**Sheila** You can barely read English.  
**Tony** I'm a poet. Authentic.

**Sheila** Grungy old Jew.  
**Tony** Anti-Semite?  
**Sheila** You're not Jewish.  
**Tony** I'm half-Jewish.  
**Sheila** I can't read him, Freud. Like Karl Marx, I can't read him, either.

*GUNFIRE.*

What is that fucking music?  
**Tony** Be machine guns. Stay right here. Don't go away. Don't move.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**Brenda** Sun coming down through holes in the sky! The sun be burning down us!  
**Rita** Be calm, Brenda!  
**Brenda** Meta-Murder! And Marxism can't save us! *(Laughs)*  
Religion! Perhaps Mormonism! Or water vapor could fill the holes. Cloud formations. Water and ice.  
**Rita** *(Baffled)* The oceans?  
**Brenda** Make new ozone. Go to Mars, grab some ice.  
Manufacture ozone. Invest in water. Must find the cool, bring the cool to the hot.

*Two GUNSHOTS, near misses.*

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* Not now, gentlemen. Ha, ha. Yeah! It's the military death disco! Be shoot-to-kill-die-young-America!  
*(Waves)* Take a moment to enjoy yourselves! *(Clicks off)*

**Brenda** (To RITA) Are you burning? The skin be a soft and delicate substance. Be careful.

**Rita** Am I peeling?

**Brenda** Uh, no. Question: Does the sun have a skin? Does it have a membrane, like a skin? Answer: Yes. It is the solar system. Sunspots flash and the rabbit population goes up! (*Laughs*)

**C.C.** Thing about the genes. What a man wants, pump his genes.

**Rita** We know all about it.

**C.C.** Bodies. Look out, people staring inconsolably at bodies, at imagery.

**Rita** Don't look.

**C.C.** I don't do that anymore. I feel remorseful about looking. I keep my head down now. I keep my eyes straight now. (*Walks*)

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, find TONY and SHEILA.*

**Tony** (*Recites or sings CATULLUS #32*)  
*I beg of you, my sweet, my Ipsitilla,  
my darling, my sophisticated beauty,  
summon me to a midday assignation;  
and, if you're willing, do me one big favor  
don't let another client shoot the door bolt,  
and don't decide to suddenly go cruising,  
but stay home and get yourself all ready  
for nine—yes, nine—successive copulations!  
Honestly, if you want it, give the order.  
I've eaten, and I'm sated, supinated!  
My prick is poking through my cloak and tunic.*

**Sheila** Whoa! I like that one. I liked it. Ummmm. Nine times. Catullus.

**Tony** Him again.

**Sheila** But that was not Lesbia. That was some filthy hooker.

**Tony** The Romans, they had a lot of troubles. They didn't take care of their poor. They were afraid of their poor. Am I right?

**Sheila** You read this? You looked it up?

**Tony** I learned it. I take classes.

**Sheila** So why ask me?

**Tony** Because you're smart.

**Sheila** No. Because you're bragging on yourself. Next time bring your own. And bring some other shit, too.

**Tony** What you got?

**Sheila** You can trick me for it. *(Laughs)* But don't tell the Preacher. What you do. Bragging on yourself.

**Tony** He wouldn't hurt me. Man's a pal of mine.

**Sheila** Yeah, yeah. You should come over to my side.

**Tony** No.

**Sheila** Why not?

**Tony** My mother. My people.

**Sheila** Brenda. You're all gonna die over there.

**Tony** We're all gonna die anyway.

**Sheila** Not me, Tony. Not so fast. Let's go. Let's go into one of these buildings.

**Tony** Wait. Snipers.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**Rita** Man says, "I have a feeling of hope." He may mean the opposite: "I have a dread feeling." He don't know. He say.

Then he don't know and I don't know. He thinks you mean what he means. She say, "That ain't you. That your mama talkin'." Dreams, they act like memories. Projections, they seem virtual.

*C.C. pulls his gun. BRENDA ducks.*

**C.C.** Tony played games with the other side. Dope games. Mind games. He liked that shit, Tony. I'll take the child.

**Rita** Shoot!

**C.C.** Would you like a bullet through the head?

**Rita** I have seen the dirty face of death.

**C.C.** I know you have.

**Rita** So fuck off. *(Pause)* There is day and night and there is the sky, and that's all there is.

**C.C.** And the child?

**Rita** And there is a child.

**C.C.** But it doesn't belong to you, Rita.

**Rita** Yes, it does. A Jewish child.

**C.C.** Brenda's not Jewish.

**Rita** Tony's child. *(Pause)*

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, BRENDA joins TONY.*

**Brenda** Hey, Tony.

**Tony** Yo.

**Brenda** What's the matter?

**Tony** Mom be always on my bubble.

**Brenda** What for?

**Tony** Viruses. Whatever.

**Brenda** You told her?  
**Tony** Don't I go for counseling?  
**Brenda** You told her?  
**Tony** I could be on TV.  
**Brenda** No wonder.  
**Tony** I could tell my story. I could sing it. (*Big strut*)  
**Brenda** She knows.  
**Tony** I am no bullshit white boy, me.  
**Brenda** Where you goin'?  
**Tony** Cab time.  
**Brenda** You cross over, Tony?  
**Tony** Who?  
**Brenda** You. You cross over? In your cab?  
**Tony** You're thinking about other people, B. You're not thinking about me.  
**Brenda** You. Tony.  
**Tony** Not me.  
**Brenda** Don't lie, Tony.  
**Tony** Get it out of your head, B.  
**Brenda** You going cabbing, or for class?  
**Tony** I'm working, then I go to class.  
**Brenda** You got extra money coming in?  
**Tony** I get tips, don't I? I rap to the fuckers. They love that shit.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**C.C.** (*Of the child, as BRENDA rejoins them*) Give it to me and you can go.  
**Rita** No! Brenda?  
**Brenda** NO!

**C.C.** Brenda. More wired than awake, more frenzied than alive.  
Unfit, wouldn't you say?

**Rita** I wouldn't say.

**C.C.** Give up the child. Fresh start. Good life.

**Rita** And she?

**C.C.** Back to the hospital. You go free. I take the child.

**Rita** Be a Jewish child.

**C.C.** What they want.

**Rita** Half-Jewish!

**C.C.** What they want.

**Rita** For what?

**C.C.** Raise it up. Blood offering.

**Rita** Slave! Sacrifice!

*He is about to fire into Rita's head—when C.C.'s phone rings.*

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* It's not time yet, people! I am the Preacher. Sheila? Don't ask me stupid questions! And don't call me—I'll call you! *(Hangs up. To RITA)* Dumb fucks. They call me the Preacher.

**Brenda** We know!

**Rita** Our fathers cut into the equatorial rain forests, and the viruses came out. *(Breaks into uncontrollable tears)*

*C.C. looks on helplessly.*

**Brenda** Tony was a poet! He loved to talk his shit! He walked his talk! *(To C.C.)* Do you?

**C.C.** I taught the sucker everything he knew. Am I right?

**Brenda** You're not Jewish!

**C.C.** So what? (*Laughs*) I could be. I might be. You never know.

**Brenda & Rita** You're not Jewish. You can't be Jewish. There's nothing Jewish about you. You have not one Jewish cell in your body. If you were Jewish, you would know it and I would know it. You would be intelligent, for one thing. There would be no question. As it is, you're not, so forget about it.

**C.C.** I'm restless and eager to do. I love life and God. I make a lot of money.

**Brenda** Ha! You hear that?

*Rapid GUNFIRE, off.*

**C.C.** Stay right here. Don't go away. Don't move. (*Exits to pool*)

**Brenda** (*Of the shooters*) Psychopaths, like him.

**Rita** They are not sane.

**Brenda** They shoot to kill. They shoot for fun.

**Rita** It's true.

**Brenda** Let's run.

**C.C.** (*Off*) Shut the fuck up! Cut!

*GUNFIRE stops.*

**Rita** (*Of C.C.*) A strange creature. Exotic creature, he. An odd duck.

**Brenda** Is he judging me?

**Rita** Yes.

**Brenda** Do you feel he likes me?

**Rita** No. I believe he thinks we have a real relationship.

**Brenda** You and me?

**Rita** No. He and I. What's he doing now?

**Brenda** He's taking a dip.

**Rita** Maybe he'll forget to breathe and drown himself.

**Brenda** Do we snap him?

**Rita** Man's a preacher, knows stuff, feels bad.

**Brenda** Let's snap him!

**Rita** He has employees. They—

**Brenda** Let's snap him, grab his phone. Where's his guards?  
*(Pause, sound of BABY)* Hear the baby?

**Rita** Sounds good. *(Rocking)* Excellent baby.

**Brenda** Wonderful baby.

**Rita** They want the baby.

**Brenda** What for?

**Rita** Trade. We go, baby stay.

**Brenda** Drop dead.

**Rita** Wonderful baby.

**Brenda** What's he doing, sneaking nips down there?

**Rita** Get your juice today? Take your pills today?

**Brenda** Yeah, yeah. I've had enough. *(As TONY)* I've had enough.  
Long line. Biological failures. Hoarse whining. Yellowish  
complexions. Childish demands. Hassling of nurses. I've  
had enough.

**Rita** Tony!

**Brenda** *(Of C.C.)* Did he call you, "darling"?

**Rita** He wants the child. He wants the baby.

**Brenda** Let's snap the fucker.

**Rita** He's kind sometimes.

**Brenda** I'm the mother.

**Rita** You're not a mother.

**Brenda** So let's go.

**Rita** No.

**Brenda** It's mine. Uh, oh. (*Of C.C.*) He's coming back.

*Re-enter C.C., wet.*

**C.C.** Did you miss me?

**Rita** No.

**Brenda** Sneakin' nips are ya?

**C.C.** (*A bit tipsy*) Ah, refreshed. Public pools: reward. Provide amusement parks and pools, beach-front pleasure, hoops, hip-hop, chits for the indigent, and so on.

**Rita** A horror. (*To BRENDA*) Watch out for the mood change.

**Brenda** (*To C.C.*) We thought you drowned. Ha, ha, ha.

**C.C.** I could drop you down the sewer, Brenda. No trouble at all. Drink your fuckin' junk-juice, Brenda. Fuckin' shit was invented by Hitler. You're not clean. Go back on the rack an' climb the fuckin' walls.

**Rita** There it is.

**Brenda** Be hard.

**C.C.** Ha, ha, fuck you.

**Brenda** I got drunk in high school a lot.

**C.C.** I'm not drunk.

**Brenda** My parents gave me tranquilizers. And then I took to crank. One thing led to another. Then I got on the program.

**C.C.** Junk-juice program.

**Brenda** Where I met my Tony.

**C.C.** You are not Jewish.

**Brenda** I know I'm not.

**Rita** I AM. Thank God.

**C.C.** Not you.

**Brenda** I'm Italian.

**Rita** My husband was Italian.

**C.C.** Jewish parents are not poor. Jewish parents do not give their children drugs.

**Rita** Long gone.

**C.C.** Were your parents your parents?

**Brenda** My parents WERE my parents.

**C.C.** Not you.

**Rita** My real name is Rita Burns. I got tired of being a waitress. I did know you once.

**C.C.** I'll help you find a home, Rita.

**Rita** We were poor, and my mother was psychotic. Unbearable stress. There used to be a vacant lot. I played on the fire escape. Strangers came. There was an aunt who smelled like talcum powder and an uncle who smoked. I needed help, but it came too late. I forget to breathe. I'm always holding my breath, me, waiting to get whacked. I was undernourished. Trouble to breathe. My mother, she tried to starve us. In the morning, hard bread and tea. In the afternoon, porridge. Leave me alone, she said, and hoarded dollars in socks. Psychosis lay waiting, like a virus, waiting. She was mean and cold. We are talking child murder here.

**C.C.** Be handed down in the family, like with Tony. Am I right?

**Brenda** Sir, you are a bag!

**C.C.** I could have you hanged on a clothesline, Brenda. Time is running out. You're a junk-juice suckin' junkie and Rita doesn't love you.

**Brenda** You don't know! But I know the truth of you! You are no hero, you! You are no savior! You are no preacher!  
*(Hides under the parachute)*

**C.C.** Good. Tony used to be with her. I wasn't in the picture. They set up housekeeping. Brenda, she was clean and sober in every way, and the virus didn't matter, because Tony was asymptomatic. And then one day Brenda stopped taking her pills. She had to be alone. Tony freaked, he'd OD'd on crack, he fell down gasping. Say?

**Rita** I won't say.

**C.C.** They found him on the floor, coughing. Pneumonia. That's it. They had to plug him into the respirator. And now?

**Rita** Now he is ashes.

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, find TONY and SHEILA.*

**Sheila** You don't see me.

**Tony** I don't see you?

**Sheila** I'm the class of this city but you stay on your side with crazy Brenda.

**Tony** It is not safe over here.

**Sheila** Scared?

**Tony** Ain't it me who comes over?

**Sheila** Scared?

**Tony** Not me!

**Sheila** Scared?

**Tony** No!

**Sheila** Scared and run! You're still a baby.

**Tony** I seen it all already.

**Sheila** Get over it. Enjoy. Take no prisoners. Life's too short and death is sudden.

**Tony** Who was serious?

**Sheila** Go ahead and die if you want to. With her.

**Tony** Not me.

**Sheila** What you want.

**Tony** I'm feeling fucking great!

**Sheila** My people, you see them, it gets like ten below zero, they're freezing to death in cardboard boxes along the railroad tracks. *(Silence)* I want you to bring something over to your side for me. Some money. Some food.

**Tony** For you, no problem.

**Sheila** My father kicked my mother out of the apartment. She's over there now. Your side. I could see her leaving from my window, down in the parking lot, in the brown slush, crying. She was all by herself. Just one car in the lot, holding my mother. Snipers—from both sides. Everything around grey and black and old snow—winter, bitter, my mother down there hunched over with her face in her hands. My father came running up behind me and grabbed my hair. I could see he was terrified in his fuckin' eyes. He started to run to bring her back, but he couldn't run fast enough. *(Snaps her fingers)* I looked down onto the parking lot and she was gone—just a big dead, dirty corner lot, empty and wet. Bullets slamming into the icy slush.

**Tony** I'll talk to the Preacher.

**Sheila** You can't trust C.C.! How many times!

**Tony** Forget about it.

**Sheila** Check her out yourself.

**Tony** Okay, I will.

**Sheila** Thank you, darling.

**Tony** Don't call me darling.

**Sheila** I'll give you love. Not like that madwoman, Brenda.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**C.C.** Tell Brenda I can crack her: change her spine forever, me.  
Result: permanent backache.

**Rita** Brenda!

**C.C.** Alternative: burn down the neighborhood. A little kerosene and a match: out she comes. Ha, ha, ha.

*BRENDA comes out of hiding.*

**Brenda** Okay!

**C.C.** They are waiting for you, Brenda.

**Brenda** (As *TONY*) I hope they all die. I hope they are mangled.  
I hope they burn.

**Rita** Why our child? A Jewish child? Tony's child?

**C.C.** I told you. Love and retribution.

**Brenda** When a child is born, death is defeated!

**Rita** Love comes streaming down then. God shows his love then!

**C.C.** Over there, no more Jewish people. None left. No survivors. I'll tell you what they did, them. Say?

**Rita** No.

**Brenda** Say.

**C.C.** War. A roundup. Four hundred Jewish people, they ran them through the slaughterhouse.

*RITA gags and weeps.*

**C.C.** Where I come from, nobody loved nobody.

**Brenda** It shows!

**C.C.** Me and Tony, we came up together. We did time together. We ran the neighborhood, him and me. But Tony was playing with the other side. He insulted the wrong people. Now for the payment.

**Rita** No!

**C.C.** Is it yours?

**Brenda & Rita** Yes.

**C.C.** I'll take it.

**Brenda & Rita** No!

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* Time?

**Brenda & Rita** No!

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* Time?

**Brenda & Rita** No!

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* Time?

**Brenda & Rita** No!

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* Put Sheila on. Hello? I want an extension. Are you deaf? I'm tired. What? *(Clicks off. To RITA and BRENDA)* Be clear to me now, clear as shadows on a bright day.

**Brenda** Oh, yeah?

**C.C.** Hostile?

**Brenda** Give an example.

**C.C.** Be with one, fall in love with she. Lose both. Repeat, repeat.

**Brenda** I didn't follow that.

**C.C.** Emotions and desires: ephemeral. Fade. Can love endure?

**Brenda** I have the intelligence to understand that.

**C.C.** Okay, listen up. There is a woman with a baby. She loves it to pieces. She's totally attached to it. She'll do anything for it. She's a slave to it and a martyr.

**Brenda & Rita** Say?

**C.C.** She is jealous of the baby so she won't allow help. Though the baby is difficult and needs a lot of care, she doesn't let anyone else get too close to the baby.

**Brenda & Rita** And?

**C.C.** Before the authorities, she weeps and laments. Who among us can resist a mother's martyrdom?

**Brenda & Rita** Not one of us.

**C.C.** And so she continues in thrall to the baby, and the baby in bondage to she. *(Pause)* Be only one problem.

**Brenda & Rita** Say?

**C.C.** It's not her baby.

**Brenda & Rita** Conclude?

**C.C.** The baby must be separated from this woman and restored to her rightful blood.

**Rita** A parable?

**C.C.** No.

**Rita** A riddle?

**C.C.** Think it over. You have five minutes. *(Exits to pool)*

**Brenda** What the fuck?

**Rita** That was rude!

**Brenda** Sheila? *(Of the carriage)* We have minutes, so let go.

**Rita** No.

**Brenda** Are we alike at all?

**Rita** You're not Jewish.

**Brenda** We have nothing in common but Tony.

**Rita** We know what's what, the Jews. It's in the Bible.

**Brenda** Sheila? *(Off, splashing from the pool. Of C.C.)* I think he likes to wash himself.

**Rita** He thinks he's beautiful for a worm-like creature.

**Brenda** He's a water freak. We snap him.

**Rita**           *(Rocking the carriage)* You can do what you want, you.

**Brenda**       Let's run.

**Rita**           Not we.

**Brenda**       Why not?

**Rita**           Not we.

**Brenda**       You blame me?

**Rita**           I'm trying.

**Brenda**       You blame?

**Rita**           No.

**Brenda**       I'm trying.

**Rita**           I know.

**Brenda**       Forgive me? *(Pause)* When I met Tony, I had tracks all over, like the pox. I was hookin' for fixes. I got on the program and took my pills. He started cracking, Tony. He knew he was going to die, he. Virus—no forgiveness. Tony. Just a boy. He cracked. I knew he knew he was going to die. He fell down. I? I was panicked. I wanted to go into hospital. I wanted to be alone, me. Nobody dying. Me alone. Tony cracked. He fell down. Me. He made friends with death, Tony. We had a good life. We had a family. We had a future. He had—he made friends with death. Say?

**Rita**           I forgive you.

**Brenda**       Say?

**Rita**           I forgive you.

**Brenda**       Say?

**Rita**           I forgive you.

*Re-enter C.C., all wet.*

**Brenda**       Here he comes. *(To C.C.)* Who is Sheila?

**C.C.** Hey? Man must live and enjoy the flaws. Pussy by the pool, and so on. But I keep my eyes down now. That is, I try.

**Brenda** Who is Sheila?

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, find TONY and SHEILA.*

**Sheila** You don't look good.

**Tony** I feel great.

**Sheila** Are you using?

**Tony** Not me.

**Sheila** Okay, Tony.

**Tony** You don't know what you're looking at.

**Sheila** Do you have any money?

**Tony** I don't have any money.

**Sheila** What do you do with it all?

**Tony** I have responsibilities.

**Sheila** Are you sick?

**Tony** No.

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

**Tony** Shoot me.

**Sheila** Not so fast. I heard of a story. There's a swordsman, he liked to pick up girls. There's a carnival, where he goes to find one. There's a strange girl, and they see each other. She's dressed funny, you know, like, revealing. She could be the love of his life, his one true love. She warns him: I might be crazy for all you know, maybe you don't want to go dancing with me. Let's go dancing, he says, and see what happens. They have a wild time—until the men from the asylum come. She fights like a tiger but they beat her down. She's killed three men, they tell him, in a breakout to go dancing. Two

men she stabbed, the other she decapitated. Remind you of someone?

**Tony** Brenda!

**Sheila** Is she pregnant?

**Tony** Who?

**Sheila** Brenda. Is she pregnant? (*Pause*) You don't know?

**Tony** Yeah.

**Sheila** Yeah, you know, or yeah she's pregnant?

**Tony** Yeah, she's pregnant.

**Sheila** How?

**Tony** How?

**Sheila** You heard me—yours?

**Tony** Mine.

**Sheila** I don't think so. I'd like to slap you.

**Tony** Go ahead.

*She slaps him.*

**Sheila** I'll kill her. Then I'll rip the child out of her stomach.

**Tony** I don't think so.

**Sheila** After you die, Tony. Once you're dead, I'll take care of it.

**Tony** I won't die.

**Sheila** Revenge and retribution.

**Tony** No reason, then.

**Sheila** What I say.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**Rita** Calm down, Brenda.

**Brenda** Fifty times a day I'm wrong! Am I imagining things? (*Sulks*)

**C.C.** Decision?  
**Rita** Yes.  
**C.C.** Will you give me the child?  
**Rita** No.

*C.C. takes BRENDA aside.*

**C.C.** Fucking ants are taking over the planet. And they bite.  
**Brenda** Are you nice now?  
**C.C.** You're cute.  
**Brenda** How many of you are you?

*Off, BABY crying.*

**C.C.** I'll tell you about Sheila.  
**Brenda** You're not a bad guy, really. You're nice sometimes.  
**C.C.** Pay attention. I was dealing hemp, I was just getting started in business. I brought her a nickel bag. I didn't realize she liked me. She wore a see-through gown. She was skinny but cute. She lay down seductively, offering her body in exchange for grass. "Will you trick me for it," said she.  
**Brenda** Say?  
**C.C.** I said I couldn't do it at first, loyalty and so on. Shy and confused. I could taste her pussy but I was afraid of dishonor. Once we took a ride on a motor-scooter and necked on Fifty-ninth Street. A man shouted at us to get out of public view. Sex seemed dirty then.  
**Brenda** I have problems in that area.  
**C.C.** Sure you do, Brenda. I let it alone and Tony grabbed it.  
**Brenda** Are you mean now?

**C.C.** Then a connection is made. Any good: substances exchanged. Lasts: forever. Mysterious, permanent.

**Brenda** Babies are born from it, too.

**C.C.** That's right, Brenda. How?

**Brenda** I know how.

**C.C.** Good for you, Brenda.

**Brenda** But not now.

*C.C. laughs.*

I have a tendency to want to be alone. But I've enjoyed this part of the conversation.

**C.C.** Good.

**Brenda** You can be just a regular guy, seems like.

**C.C.** You want attention.

**Brenda** I suffer that. Along with the feeling of being wrong.

**C.C.** Where I grew up, they strung up cats on clotheslines, and tried to fuck the younger ones in the ass. Where did you grow up?

**Brenda** Brooklyn, U.S.A. *(To RITA)* This man's cool. Honey, this man's been baptized, or something.

**Rita** Light's changing.

**Brenda** Man could be a friend of mine.

**Rita** This is a special light. I love it. Brenda?

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, BRENDA joins TONY.*

**Brenda** What you got, boy?

**Tony** *(Sings:)*

*If any pleasure can come to a man through recalling*

*decent behavior in his relations with others,  
not breaking his word, and never, in any agreement,  
deceiving men by abusing vows sworn to heaven,  
then countless joys will await you in old age, Catullus,  
as a reward for this unrequited passion!*

*For all of those things which a man could possibly  
say or do have all been said and done by you already,  
and none of them counted for anything.*

**Brenda** What's that?

**Tony** Poetry.

**Brenda** Are you sick?

**Tony** How do I look to you?

**Brenda** You need to build up something that could fight it off.

**Tony** What for?

**Brenda** You could fight it off.

**Tony** Okay.

**Brenda** You're in very good shape.

**Tony** They'll have cars that talk to you and fly. You'll have a home address, it'll be a cubicle with a bed and some shelves, there'll be a number—that'll be your home—be a gigantic barracks!

**Brenda** She thinks she's in charge, she thinks she can drive right over me, say? She thinks she can fox me and tell me what to do!

**Tony** Who?

**Brenda** She!

**Tony** Who?

**Brenda** Rita! Yeah, well, I'm out here sweetie, I'm gone baby, you no longer run my life, you bitch!

**Tony** Wait! The baby!

**Brenda** Not yours!  
**Tony** Say?  
**Brenda** Mine!  
**Tony** Where you goin’?  
**Brenda** Virus, remember! Precaution, remember!  
**Tony** No! Wait, you!

*END FLASHBACK.*

**Rita** Brenda?  
**Brenda** Yo, Rita! *(To C.C.)* Ha, ha—fuck you.  
**C.C.** Fuck you—ha, ha.  
**Brenda & Rita** You don’t know anything. You’re a performer, a politician, a hipster philosopher, an artiste. The real horror—you don’t know it. The real death—you don’t know it. The real abuses—you only dream them, you!  
**C.C.** Ha, ha, fuck you.  
**Brenda & Rita** We don’t talk the same talk! We don’t walk the same walk! We’re not on the same ground! We’re on different sides of the world! We’re on different angles! We on a different edge! The shape is not the same shape! You are in a parallel world, you!  
**C.C.** Swim-time! *(Exits to pool)*  
**Rita** He’s got us, Brenda. No ID. No money. Insecure and homeless. What he wants, he gets.  
**Brenda** Can we have an exchange about this?  
**Rita** Speak.  
**Brenda** We couldn’t handle the responsibility. We can’t provide stability. For example, I would have to get off the junk-juice.  
**Rita** Of course. You wish to stay bloated? You wish to stay

medicated? You wish to segue to the junk-juice boat every single sunny day? Is that the proper atmosphere for child-rearing or parenting?

**Brenda** It's not done. It's impossible. Be in the bones.

**Rita** What I say?

**Brenda** I'll cry.

**Rita** Okay. I'll make plans.

**Brenda** But not today.

**Rita** I'm always holding my breath.

**Brenda** Say?

**Rita** Remember Tony. Last gasp, and death.

**Brenda** Take care.

**Rita** Say?

**Brenda** A person could string out on that.

**Rita** You don't know. Blame?

**Brenda** No.

**Rita** Blame?

**Brenda** No.

**Rita** I was his mother.

**Brenda** No blame.

**Rita** Say?

**Brenda** I forgive you.

*Pause. SPLASHING, off.*

*(Of C.C.)* Guy's got a real problem with water. Did ya notice? *(As TONY)* Time now to snap the fucker.

**Rita** Ah. I'm breathing.

**Brenda** *(As Tony)* Snap his fuckin' neck, snatch his phone, flee to the Yucatán.

**Rita** Sarajevo was the place to be. Twenty years from now, people will have said with pride, “I was in Sarajevo in the 90s.”

**Brenda** They’d like to be sniped and starved?

**Rita** They will have suffered and endured.

**Brenda** Kids, they learn fast what’s what. Survive first, be nice later. Kids are sticking it to each other everywhere. Rio, Brooklyn, L.A.—what time is it?

**Rita** Remember Tony. No one remembers very long, do they? Life dropped him like he was a bunch of bananas.

*Re-enter C.C., wet.*

**C.C.** Speaking of me again?

**Rita** We don’t always talk about you, C.C.

**C.C.** Say?

**Rita** Tony.

**Brenda** I’ll tell you what happened. They lock you away and you’re alone. You’re alone and you got time to think and there’s no action. You start to look at yourself. Visiting day, you get to see the ruins—my Tony and me was the same. We did the same and acted the same. Only he was out and I was in, he was loose and I was tied. He got the virus, not me. Only he it was who died the dirty death.

**Rita** *(To C.C.)* She’s trashing his life. *(Sigh)* That’s what he’s used to. Tony was a junkie. Once a junkie, always a junkie. Tony?

*FLASHBACK. On the bench, TONY—lying down—responds to RITA.*

**Tony** Mom?

**Rita** Tony!

**Tony** Get me out of here, Mom.

**Rita** I told you a hundred times, Tony. Give it up or it will kill you—and it did.

**Tony** No one knew, which spoon, which point—no one even heard of it.

**Rita** You stupid kid.

**Tony** I was ripping off your goods, Mom. I'm sorry.

**Rita** I forgive you.

**Tony** I'm sorry, Mom.

**Rita** I forgive you.

**Tony** Get me out of here.

**Rita** I can't, Tony. Pneumonia, Tony.

**Tony** Therapy. Group counseling. School and cab, Mom.

**Rita** First they have to clear the pneumonia, honey, and then you can go.

**Tony** You don't believe me, Mom?

**Rita** I believe you.

**Tony** Rita.

**Rita** I believe you.

**Tony** My feet are swollen.

**Rita** They are swollen, Tony.

**Tony** I fell down on the floor, Mom.

**Rita** I know you did. (*Weeps*)

**Tony** Don't worry, Rita. I have made friends with death.

**Rita** (*Gagging*) Ah!

**Tony** Where's Brenda?

**Rita** She's in another hospital, Tony.

**Tony** Is she coming?

**Rita** She's coming soon.  
**Tony** She's a head case, B. She has demons.  
**Rita** She loves you. She loves you very much.  
**Tony** Love, Mom?  
**Rita** She loves you.  
**Tony** Time?  
**Rita** Not time.  
**Tony** Time!  
**Rita** Not time yet, Tony.  
**Tony** Time!  
**Rita** Say?  
**Tony** Time!  
**Rita** Not yet, Tony.  
**Tony** My shot! Where's my shot? It's time!

*END FLASHBACK.*

**Rita** Brenda?  
**Brenda** *(As TONY, big strut)* Shut the fuck up! I'm trying to change. I want to change. But you can't force change, you can't will change, and you can't act changed!  
**Rita** *(To BRENDA)* You're hysterical!  
**C.C.** And the child?  
**Rita** You want love and you can't buy it or steal it!  
**C.C.** "Mom be always on my bubble." *(Laughs)*  
**Brenda** That's what Tony used to say!  
**Rita** He was a good kid!  
**C.C.** Five percent of the time.  
**Rita** He used to watch for the white-coats. He kept one eye out. Time for his shot. Time for his shot. He'd move you

out of the way. Time for my shot, Mom. Get out of the way. Time. Then they put him on a morphine drip. (To C.C.) Have you no capacity for grief?

**C.C.** “I have made friends with death.”

**Brenda** That’s what Tony said!

**Rita** Poor Tony. He could not breathe with his own lungs. The respirator breathed him. (*Weeps*)

**C.C.** Tony was great. The ace of street kids. The King. I miss him. Even though he ripped me off every chance he got. Manipulative sonofabitch.

**Brenda** He always made sure the lights were out and there was food in the refrigerator. He took care. And he was a hustler. I liked that. He would take a job. He drove a taxicab. Something came up through my uncle, a pallbearer, whatever, he was ready. I liked that about Tony. He wasn’t one of those young guys: “Excuse me, but don’t bother me.”

**Rita** He was a good kid!

**C.C.** He would try to manipulate you in any way he could.

**Brenda** We had a good time. He was sweet.

*FLASHBACK. Find TONY on the bench, his face contorted.*

**Tony** What is that fucking music?

**Rita** Respirator, Tony.

**Tony** Good times.

**Rita** Oh, yeah.

**Tony** Good times.

**Rita** Oh, yeah.

**Tony** C.C.?

**Rita** No, Tony.

**Tony** C.C.?  
**Rita** No, Tony.  
**Tony** Action, Mom.  
**Rita** He is at war.  
**Tony** The commander.  
**Rita** Quiet now, Tony.  
**Tony** I can't talk.  
**Rita** You shouldn't talk.  
**Tony** Get this thing out of my mouth.  
**Rita** They won't let me, Tony.  
**Tony** Please get this thing out of my mouth.  
**Rita** I can't, Tony.  
**Tony** I'll never make it out of here alive, Mom.

*RITA gags.*

Mom?  
**Rita** Rest now.  
**Tony** Father?  
**Rita** You have no father.  
**Tony** Where?  
**Rita** Nowhere.  
**Tony** Prison, Rita.  
**Rita** I don't know.  
**Tony** Dad?  
**Rita** Not here, Tony.  
**Tony** I forgive you.  
**Rita** Say?  
**Tony** I forgive you.  
**Rita** Brenda!

**Brenda**      *(Off)* Here I am.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**Rita**      We sat with him for months. Respirator music. Incessant. He vanished into it. We fought to have it removed. Then they made us ask him four times: Are you ready to be unplugged, Tony?

**Brenda**      Are you ready to be unplugged, Tony?

**Rita**      If yes, blink with one eye, then the other. Four times.

**C.C.**      And did he?

**Rita**      I couldn't tell. But the white-coats thought he did. They removed the machine from his throat. We held him in our arms. Twenty minutes later he gasped and died. They turned him over like refuse. They asked us to leave. He was now inanimate matter. Brenda cried with me. When a child appears, he comes from heaven. Even his shit is sweet. Is that so, Preacher?

**C.C.**      That is so.

**Rita**      Then I have the following questions: What is the sacred? When does it start?

**C.C.**      Now we are here, we live. Before: parents.

**Rita**      That is an answer, but that is not what I asked. That is an answer to a question I did not ask. Is there a sacred? When does it start? When does it end? Was Tony's death a sacred death? The white-coats said, "Ask four times. If yes, then blink an eye. Tell us if you are ready to die or not." Are you ready to die, Tony? I couldn't tell if he blinked. Four times. They unhooked the machine, finally. They turned the switch, they pulled the tube. He struggled to breathe

and then he breathed his last. I wanted to sit quietly, but they rushed in and started cleaning it up. *(Pause)* What an awful disease, a dreadful disease, a disgusting disease. He was a boy of twenty-five. Who did he shoot up with in some filthy hallway? In some tenement dump? In what fucking dope-filled project?

**Brenda** What's a virus, Craig?

**C.C.** A virus be a moving thing, they aim to replicate. One aim: make copies. Repeat, repeat. But must have living cells. Are parasites. Nature's way: correction. Like war and famine, like quake, riot, fire, and flood.

**Rita** Did he notice?

**C.C.** Say?

**Rita** Tony. The moment of death. Did he notice it?

**C.C.** I don't know. I wasn't there. Time, please?

**Brenda & Rita** Oh! The time!

**C.C.** You have missed your appointment.

**Rita** Light changing.

**C.C.** Pay attention. I know these people. They won't stay with this much longer. Game: blood and bodies. Exchange of living or dead. They shoot to kill.

**Brenda** The time!

**Rita** Be dark again. This is what I remember.

**Brenda** Say?

**Rita** The feeling at twilight.

**C.C.** Who is the mother of this child?

**Brenda & Rita** I am!

**C.C.** When was the kid born?

**Brenda & Rita** When Tony died!

**C.C.** What did you give for him?

**Brenda & Rita** Nothing!

*C.C.'s PHONE rings.*

**C.C.** Hello? I told you not to call me. I know what time it is. I'm not a kidnapper. I'm not a baby-stealer. I'm trying to do the right thing. I've had a harder life than any of you. I've earned every penny, every honor. I am the captain, I am the commander. I am organized, and I am true. Chance has nothing to do with it. You're a bunch of drunken, homicidal maniacs who belong in mental institutions under heavy guard. *(Pause)* You heard me.

**Brenda** Uh, oh.

**C.C.** *(Into phone)* You can't give people things or try to help—causes hatred and confusion. That you, Sheila? Fuck you, ha, ha. Time passes while we have this conversation. I hope you can afford it. I see—you may want to be killed anyway. No? It's thrilling to murder people? Hold your fire. *(Clicks off. To RITA and BRENDA)* Last chance for exchange of child. *(Silence)* Done. You're on your own.

**Brenda** Wait, Preacher.

**C.C.** What is it, Brenda?

**Brenda** They built a great blaze, and they put Tony into it. There was a silent burning, save for the hissing of steam.

**C.C.** Say?

**Brenda** There was a condensation in the spirit world, a gathering of force—like clouds, like rain.

**C.C.** Where?

**Brenda** In the atmosphere. Cleansing, redemption. Say?

*FLASHBACK. Near the bench, C.C. and TONY.*

**C.C.** Tony!

**Tony** Yo, Preacher!

*Elaborate handshake.*

**C.C.** How you doin', man?

**Tony** I'm feeling fucking great.

**C.C.** That's Tony!

**Tony** How's the Preacher Man?

**C.C.** Hey, I'm goin' to war, pal. I'm going to straighten out the issue! I will finalize it, me! Are you there?

**Tony** I am with you, C.C.!

**C.C.** Am I right?

**Tony** Right as rain, Preacher!

**C.C.** Will they make up poems about the Preacher?

Will they make an epic about the Preacher Man?

**Tony** I don't think so.

**C.C.** I'm sad about the whole thing and I'm sorry.

Forgive me?

**C.C.** It's the women, Tony. They're on a different path.

**Tony** No blame.

**C.C.** The child be on its own now.

**Tony** I'm the child.

**C.C.** Say?

**Tony** I'm the child.

*END FLASHBACK.*

**C.C.** (*Into phone*) Get off the line, I'm calling my mother. Hello? Mom? Once I was a handsome young street prince, Mom, I believed in romance, or: Sex was too much for me, and close-ups confused my mind. Is everything on tape? Me, immense ego, low self-esteem. White nigger. Commit: spiritual crime. Did I? I? Falling...closeups. Two-shots. Result: fear. Result: confusion. Just listen. I'm in a hurry. No, be close-up, intimacy: self-love. Be action, fast: revenge, adventure. Heroes, beautiful dames. (*As TONY*) Inside: little boy, little white nigger boy, nobody loved nobody, white nigger Jew boy, slave boy, just a boy, frightened, lonely boy. (*Clicks off*) Dream on. (*Starts off*)

**Rita** Wait, you!

**C.C.** The core of the earth is molten rock, or liquid metal. It is hotter than the surface of the sun.

**Rita** Say?

**C.C.** I'll be finishing my thought, which is: The core of the earth is hot, and the crust of the earth is thin, and the sun and the moon.

**Rita** Be what?

**C.C.** When you look at what a man be.

**Brenda** I see what he's saying.

**Rita** Say?

**C.C.** Be dust. (*Pause*) It's time. This is for the record. (*Into phone*) Whoever makes it up the switchback and lives—she is the mother.

**Rita** And you? Where are you going, you?

**C.C.** Well, I just have a feeling of fate. I feel like there are waves, and one of them's got my name on it. (*Into phone*) Last word: Ha, ha, fuck you. What else? Nothing else.

Next time I see you, come out firing. We shoot on sight.  
(Goes)

**Rita** I realize there's an end to my story. There's a be-all and end-all, built in to the story. Be: the end. World collapse.

**Brenda** Say?

**Rita** What if I didn't believe that? Suppose the world goes on and on? Population: no problem. Viruses: cured. Forests: reborn. America: eternal. What then?

**Brenda** The time!

**Rita** We're escaping together!

**Brenda** I have hypertension. I have angst.

**Rita** What time is it?

**Brenda** I believed in C.C. for a minute because he had something to say.

**Rita** Electro-mathematics, I think it was.

**Brenda** The Way of the Psychopath.

**Rita** That's it.

*GUNFIRE.*

Oh! A battle!

**Brenda** He is shooting! He is fighting!

**Rita** Oh! What now!?

**Brenda** He's going into the water.

**Rita** Look at him swim!

*GUNFIRE stops.*

They got him.

**Brenda** Is he flapping?

**Rita** He is flapping.

**Brenda** Is he floating?

**Rita** He is floating. *(Pause)* He was a good man, basically. He could see his end coming in a wave.

**Brenda** He was loyal, but he had a bad side to him.

**Rita** When I die, I hope people say nice things about me.

**Brenda** He couldn't tell the difference between what he did and what he saw in his head.

**Rita** I see now that I don't have my own fate. My fate is my Mom.

**Brenda** Maybe there *are* no reasons. People like to interfere with the pleasures of others, or to inflict torture upon them.

**Rita** Let's go.

*Pause. BRENDA grabs the baby carriage and races up the switchback. Gunfire. BRENDA makes it to the top, then falls, shot. Pause. RITA trembles with indecision, then rushes up the switchback, retrieves the carriage and runs away.*

*BLACKOUT.*

**The End**