

GO OUTSIDE

A Play

By Murray Mednick

SET: A chair and a bench. No doors or props. Maybe a baseball bat and a walking stick.

RILEY

BRUNO

SOLDIER

BRUNO: We are quarantined.

RILEY: But we are not sick.

BRUNO: No.

RILEY: We are poets.

BRUNO: As in the days of old.

RILEY: As in Plato.

BRUNO: Out of the way.

RILEY: Cordoned off and underpaid.

BRUNO: Exiled to our rooms.

RILEY: Above the fray.

BRUNO: Here we are.

RILEY: Here we are.

BRUNO: We have each other.

RILEY: I suppose.

BRUNO: However.

RILEY: Yes?

BRUNO: I seem to be going after myself. Hurting myself in the night

RILEY: How so?

BRUNO: It reflects a hostile relationship to the body.

RILEY: Fails us all.

BRUNO: It's unconscious.

RILEY: No need to inflict punishment.

BRUNO: It's like answering a call from somewhere deep, from the unconscious, which holds all our secret torments.

RILEY: Sorry, Bruno.

BRUNO: Someone inside me trying to kill me. *(Noise)*

RILEY: Listen to what's going on out there.

BRUNO: It's a riot.

RILEY: It's a free for all.

BRUNO: You want to go out there?

RILEY: No.

BRUNO: We could try, make a move.

RILEY: Out the window.

BRUNO: Who would know?

RILEY: You go.

BRUNO: No.

RILEY: Why?

BRUNO: I'd get over-run by the parade. You can walk, you can run.

RILEY: Just barely.

BRUNO: Stick to the walls, stay off the street. Psychotic gangs of teenagers roaming the streets.

RILEY: There must be police.

BRUNO: Looking to crucify people.

RILEY: Soldiers.

BRUNO: Dogs, foaming at the mouth.

RILEY: Soldiers.

BRUNO: Eyes wide with fury.

RILEY: Sentries.

BRUNO: Thugs, foaming at the mouth. With knives and guns.

RILEY: At the windows and the doors.

BRUNO: On the rooftops.

RILEY: In the alleys.

BRUNO: Surveillance.

RILEY: Monitors.

BRUNO: Eyes in the sky.

RILEY: Drones.

BRUNO: We are not criminals. We are poets.

RILEY: Exactly.

BRUNO: We have rights.

RILEY: We're quarantined.

BRUNO: We have rights.

RILEY: We have no rights.

BRUNO: Maybe there's help outside.

RILEY: I'm tempted.

BRUNO: Go outside, look around, see what's happening.

RILEY: I'm thinking it over.

BRUNO: Find help.

RILEY: I don't think so.

BRUNO: Why not?

RILEY: I'm afraid.

BRUNO: I understand.

RILEY: I'm afraid of the Christians.

BRUNO: Not Christians.

RILEY: Pseudo Christians.

BRUNO: Christians of New Formation.

RILEY: I'm afraid I'll get my throat cut.

BRUNO: Don't go, then.

RILEY: Maybe not.

BRUNO: Take a quick walk maybe, look at the people. And, you know --

RILEY: I hate people.

BRUNO: You know, there's a parade and a marching band and singing and dancing and hysterical trains --

RILEY: Oh, no.

BRUNO: -- And grandiose political activities.

RILEY: It's a river of shit. Clowns and patriots. It's the white underclass, celebrating victory, cutting throats and drowning poets in rivers and wells.

BRUNO: Okay. Best to stay exiled in our rooms.

RILEY: Best to stay.

BRUNO: Hope of body --

RILEY: Is what?

BRUNO: Disease.

RILEY: Bruno?

BRUNO: It's a pain machine. So that human anguish bleeds out into the Solar System.

RILEY: Oh, come on.

BRUNO: It's our involuntary contribution to the order of things.

RILEY: Be specific.

BRUNO: Sleeping, I get back at the body, scratching and scraping, opening wounds.

RILEY: That's terrible, Bruno. That's not right.

BRUNO: And so, I need ointments and medicines.

RILEY: There are no cures, my friend.

BRUNO: I know that, Riley.

RILEY: Well. I'm not going outside.

BRUNO: Okay.

RILEY: I don't want anything to do with those people.

BRUNO: I understand.

RILEY: Because of what they are.

BRUNO: The stupidity.

RILEY: Credulous. Corrupt. Bloodthirsty.

BRUNO: Yes.

RILEY: The profound, universal stupidity.

BRUNO: I couldn't agree more.

RILEY: I know.

BRUNO: But I'm running out of painkillers. And I could use a drink.

RILEY: So, could I.

BRUNO: And I need salves for the constant itching on my ankles and my balls.

RILEY: How weird.

BRUNO: It's one of the penalties of aging. As is the loss of libido.

RILEY: And the loss of rights.

BRUNO: Keeping us confined.

RILEY: Yes. And no freedom to move. To get from here to there and back without risking your life.

BRUNO: Who said it would be easy?

RILEY: Maybe someone will come along, a relative or a friend, to ease our suffering.

BRUNO: Not likely. I have only one or two friends. Holed up, like us. Yours?

RILEY: G-d knows.

BRUNO: How little we are. How little we know.

RILEY: Clutching each other in the storm.

BRUNO: Relations?

RILEY: An ex-wife or two. A faux girlfriend by text. We love each other by text. Once we touched and an electrical shock went through us both. She's wary now and won't come near.

So, it goes. Phones have revolutionized life on Earth. Electro-chemical buzz surrounds the planet like a skin. The people are influenced without knowing it. The buzz. As they go about their business. As they riot and rape and cut throats.

BRUNO: What's the latest program?

RILEY: *Renounce and recover.*

BRUNO: What does it mean?

RILEY: The slogan of the day. It's like the Inquisition. Renounce the old and bring in the new. It's to prepare for the End of Days.

BRUNO: Oh, no.

RILEY: Oh yes, the preachers are out, the Army is out, along with the actors and singers, and hustlers and cons. Praising the return of the Messiah, which is immanent. And so, the people had better get ready.

BRUNO: What about us?

RILEY: We're not included.

BRUNO: It's insane.

RILEY: The trains are rolling. Flags flying, missionaries hanging out of the windows.

BRUNO: May the God of the Hebrews strike them dead.

RILEY: Amen.

BRUNO: The revenge not taken.

RILEY: Let us pause.

BRUNO: Let us not open the Gates of Hell. Ovens and stacks of bodies and mounds of ashes. Our people. Our loved ones going up in smoke.

RILEY: We're safe for the moment in our quarantine.

BRUNO: Are they hunting Jews?

RILEY: I don't think so. Not yet.

BRUNO: Go outside.

RILEY: Non-whites only.

BRUNO: We are Semites.

RILEY: True.

BRUNO: Like the Arabs and the Persians.

RILEY: Skin color is the thing.

BRUNO: Some of us are dark. Go. See what they're like, what they're thinking, what they're planning.

RILEY: Nothing's changed.

BRUNO: Find a sympathizer. A helper. An intervention.

RILEY: They dress like clowns and lambs. Clowns to commit murder, lambs to the slaughter.

BRUNO: See for yourself.

RILEY: No. I told you. I hate people. They frighten me. What are they doing? What are they planning? I'll tell you. They're planning to cut each other's throats. That's what they're planning. They are watching to see whose head

turns, who looks away, and then ---slash! Blood flows in the street. That's what they're doing.

BRUNO: Euripides.

RILEY: Is what?

BRUNO: Was exiled like us. Into the Land of the Barbarians.

RILEY: We are there already.

BRUNO: Yes. Sea to shining sea.

RILEY: Home of the brave.

BRUNO: The delirious.

RILEY: The hysterical.

BRUNO: Still pondering?

RILEY: I don't want my throat cut.

BRUNO: No.

RILEY: I'm not an idiot.

BRUNO: Of course not.

RILEY: Right.

BRUNO: It's paranoia.

RILEY: I don't care what it is.

BRUNO: It'll do you good – breathe fresh air, exercise –

RILEY: Horse shit. Air's misty with the breath of murdered souls.

BRUNO: Loosen up. Body and mind.

RILEY: Fuck you.

BRUNO: Okay, forget it.

RILEY: You're not listening.

BRUNO: You're not saying anything.

RILEY: I'm a poet and a Jew.

BRUNO: So am I.

RILEY: That's why.

BRUNO: Why?

RILEY: I'm afraid of the Christians.

BRUNO: Okay.

RILEY: I said already.

BRUNO: Okay.

RILEY: Don't do that.

BRUNO: What?

RILEY: Condescend.

BRUNO: Okay.

RILEY: Stop saying okay all the time.

BRUNO: Right.

RILEY: There's a Jew nailed to the wall all over the country. You don't think that's insane – thoughts of vengeance stored in all the Christian hearts?

BRUNO: No.

RILEY: Thoughts of envy and hate.

BRUNO: Yes.

RILEY: Remember Rabbi Nachman, He locked himself up and never came out.

BRUNO: He was studying.

RILEY: He was hiding.

BRUNO: He was praying and fasting to bring on the Holy One.

RILEY: Right, see they already have one. The New Christians. They already have the Messiah, and they want him to come back, so now we're in the way. Think about it.

BRUNO: They want him to come back.

RILEY: They're expecting him. And then they go up to heaven with their pants on.

BRUNO: Women, too?

RILEY: Especially women.

BRUNO: Ha, ha.

RILEY: Free of charge.

BRUNO: It's absurd.

RILEY: They go their way, and we go ours.

BRUNO: Which is nowhere.

RILEY: So long as they leave us alone.

BRUNO: As they rise into the clouds.

RILEY: We're too intelligent and too talented.

BRUNO: And we're good for business.

RILEY: No, sooner or later they'll try and clean us out. We are stumbling blocks.

BRUNO: How so?

RILEY: Don't be a fool. They have a vision of the Second Coming -- bad news for the Jews, bad news for mankind.

BRUNO: I think it's crazy. A God crystalizing in the sky. It's crazy.

RILEY: Still, it's not safe to wander.

BRUNO: Maybe we're imagining things.

RILEY: Come on, Bruno. Hate. It's in the soil, it's in the air we breathe. And then there's the idea of shoveling us into camps.

BRUNO: I don't like that analogue.

RILEY: Any day now, a knock on the door. Come with us, children, time to play, safe and sound, a movie every night, thoughts and prayers and all the rest, the lies and weird beliefs, like the Sun itself is a lie, and all life comes from the center, a burning fire in the center of the Earth -- which must be fed. By dead baby sandwiches.

BRUNO: Stop it.

RILEY: Friend of mine said that onstage years ago. Virus got him. Lived in a tower on 42nd Street. Very good head-brain.

BRUNO: Sorry.

RILEY: Locked up in the tower.

BRUNO: Like us.

RILEY: Wrote Porno for a living.

BRUNO: Like us.

RILEY: She comes into the room...

BRUNO: Who never get laid.

RILEY: "She comes into the room..." No, they're outside on the lawn, kissing on the lawn. A deep kiss. A violent kiss, her tongue in his mouth. She swoons.

BRUNO: Okay.

RILEY: She grasps him and pulls him into the house, and they fall onto his couch, arms around each other tightly, pressing tightly, they can hardly move, body to body, until he gets into her crotch, and she moans loudly. She's warm and wet. I love you she says, I love you so much...

BRUNO: Okay.

RILEY: She's his next-door neighbor.

BRUNO: Good touch right there.

RILEY: You have a wonderful body, he says, I love the way you smell, I love the way you taste, I could eat you alive...

BRUNO: The beast with two backs.

RILEY: Ha! Picasso!

BRUNO: Scenes of reproductive activity.

RILEY: Ha, ha. Strange. A wiggling dot of energy breaks into an egg -- strange, an egg, and becomes us. Eventually. Who could have organized such a process?

BRUNO: Nature.

RILEY: Maybe it's agency from another galaxy – transparent, intelligent, invisible as G-d.

BRUNO: What was your friend's name?

RILEY: Walter. Good man. He got paranoid. Wouldn't leave his apartment. Had to send him his food and his meds. Bad back, like you. *The water works of Lincoln.*

BRUNO: Is what?

RILEY: A play he wrote.

BRUNO: And you? Where were you?

RILEY: I'd become a recluse myself... Hiding from the virus. Deadly invisible particles. Electrified killer waves.

BRUNO: Like me. Hiding from the people.

RILEY: The people are the virus.

BRUNO: What a thought!

RILEY: Yeah, billions, crawling around, rushing around, making a racket and eating up the planet.

BRUNO: I could use my meds. I could use a drink or a fix.

RILEY: So, could I.

BRUNO: The Carpathian Mountains.

RILEY: Is what?

BRUNO: Once a Jewish heartland. Poland/Ukraine. We have roots there. We have a spirit life there. A possible refuge there.

RILEY: We're not allowed.

BRUNO: The Land of the Baal Shem Tov.

RILEY: It's imaginary.

BRUNO: Riding in his carriage bringing joy to the people.

RILEY: I don't know about that.

BRUNO: From Lithuania to the Balkans. Now vanished. All gone. Mass graves up and down the Pale of Settlement. And we never took revenge.

RILEY: As far as we know. Maybe there were teams of assassins who filtered into Europe and slit throats.

BRUNO: Starting a trend.

RILEY: Ha, ha. No joke.

BRUNO: I was cool until the quarantine. You could hang out freely, in the park, in the plaza, in the mall. Have a drink, have a smoke, discuss the politics of the day.

RILEY: How a moron became king.

BRUNO: And then the quarantine.

RILEY: It's not too late.

BRUNO: For what? Revenge?

RILEY: No. A breakout.

BRUNO: And then what?

RILEY: We join the others. There is Resistance. A fellowship.

BRUNO: We can't win.

RILEY: Bad attitude, Bruno.

BRUNO: There are not enough of us.

RILEY: No, It's your attitude.

BRUNO: What attitude?

RILEY: Your negative attitude. Where does that come from?

BRUNO: Let me think.

RILEY: Think.

BRUNO: Okay. Not being equal, second class. It stays inside permanently, like an organ, like the heart or the lungs. It's always there, unseen, like the pulse or the breath, alongside everything you say, or think or do.

True. Don't give in.

BRUNO: I don't know about that. Here's the thing.

RILEY: Is what?

BRUNO: The way I attack myself. Listen --

RILEY: I'm tired of looking at you.

BRUNO: Likewise.

RILEY: Well, then – I'll give it a shot.

BRUNO: Go for it.

RILEY: I'll walk straight out the door.

BRUNO: What changed your mind?

RILEY: You. Your dumbass face.

BRUNO: Don't blame me, Riley.

RILEY: I need a break.

BRUNO: Go for it.

RILEY: I'll get you some pills.

BRUNO: Maybe some vodka as well. But I'd be careful if I were you. Like was said, you could get your throat cut out there. *Switch*, like in the movies. The sound of tearing flesh.

RILEY: See you later. *(Sound of door opening, rioting outside, a train approaching, door closes.)*

BRUNO: Bye. Wait! Riley! Come back! A train! *(Convulses)* Damn! *(SOUND of the approaching train, louder and louder.)* Riley! Watch out for the train! Watch out! *(SOUND fades.)* What a nightmare! *(Convulses)* Tempo! That's what made it work. On the platforms, coming out of the trains. They kept it moving. Fast, fast. Otherwise, there'd be an uprising, there'd be a riot. I'd charge, I'd charge the nearest guard and go down with him. And I'd hang on until he was dead, and I'd go down with him. Right to Hell. *(He trembles, closes his eyes. A long moment and then he hears his own voice:*

BRUNO!

He sits up straight and opens his eyes in wonder.)

BRUNO: Yes? *(No answer. A silence. Re-enter RILEY-)* That was fast.

RILEY: Not fast enough.

BRUNO: The Bloody Carnival continues?

RILEY: Yes.

BRUNO: You heard the train? You saw the train?

RILEY: Yes.

BRUNO: Tell, tell.

RILEY: It went rolling by, a hundred miles an hour, flags waving, heads nailed to the windows, eyes glazed, looking out in horror; then a line of trucks. Pulled up. Sirens blaring.

BRUNO: And then?

RILEY: They hoisted this fat godhead to the top of a building.

BRUNO: Godhead?

RILEY: A balloon. Full of hot air. Tiny, malignant eyes, a bloody mouth. TIME FOR A NEW CHRISTIAN AMERICA. Emblazoned across the sky. On the buses and the trains. A revival was happening, a new awakening for G-d and country. Singing and shouting. Bodies thrashing about. Swearing fidelity to the new world order, a Christian – *(Noises off.)*

BRUNO: What's that?

RILEY: Fireworks.

BRUNO: Wow.

RILEY: Nationalists, Bruno, white guys with plans.

BRUNO: Yeah, I've heard.

RILEY: A NEW Christian nation, sign in and prosper, everybody else out. Also drones in the air, flying around, buzzing around menacingly. Plus, machine guns on every corner. Armored trains. Cars. (*BRUNO groans.*) Are you okay?

BRUNO: I had an episode. I heard the trains. The speed of it all. The speed.

RILEY: All right now?

BRUNO: Not really.

RILEY: I feel very lucky. They had me in their sights. A New Christian Army. Conscripts. Placards on the walls: Renounce and Recover.

BRUNO: What's up with renounce and recover?

RILEY: I mean to tell you. It is about the Ascension of Man. Being prepared for the Rise. The Persians and the Jews will destroy the planet, and a wind will come up. A wind never seen on Earth; a wind greater than the wind in Judea that swept away the Amorites. And the wailing and chanting of those who have renounced their evil ways and recovered the meaning of their lives, to be ready to Ascend.

BRUNO: Holy Toledo.

RILEY: Roadblocks.

BRUNO: Roadblocks?

RILEY: Yes. Checking for documents. They have conversion kiosks set up so you can renounce and recover, as they put it, leave the old and welcome the new. You go in and make your pledge and sign up and they stamp your papers and you're good to go.

BRUNO: Renounce and recover.

RILEY: That's it. A Citizen's Army of Righteousness.

BRUNO: Otherwise, you get your throat cut.

RILEY: And you don't get to rise in the Apocalypse.

BRUNO: Obviously.

RILEY: You get thrown down to Hell.

BRUNO: Of course.

RILEY: No charge.

BRUNO: Ha, ha.

RILEY: Where it's hot and steamy.

BRUNO: No way out.

RILEY: I stayed close to home as the marching band went by playing warlike music, stirring the hearts of the faithful.

BRUNO: What happened to your ear?

RILEY: Nicked.

BRUNO: It's bleeding.

RILEY: I felt a bullet whiz by my head and then I realized –

BRUNO: What?

RILEY: The Terror of the Situation.

BRUNO: Here, put this on your ear.

RILEY: Thanks.

BRUNO: Sure.

RILEY: The absolute Horror, Bruno.

BRUNO: You're lucky you're not dead.

RILEY: The horror of existence.

BRUNO: Take a breath.

RILEY: I thought I was dead, crouching against the wall, cringing, the train went speeding by, and then a bullet, a shot from the mob.

BRUNO: Random?

RILEY: Who knows? Everybody has got a gun. It's part of the new religion, the rules of the State: Armed and Ready is another slogan of the day. If you see a nigger or a kike shoot him dead on the spot. Or anyone else for that matter. If you don't look right.

BRUNO: Armed and ready.

RILEY: And keep your mouth shut.

BRUNO: Renounce and recover.

RILEY: Open fire.

BRUNO: Somebody saw you.

RILEY: Apparently.

BRUNO: Somebody who doesn't even know you.

RILEY: Or someone who does. Some crackerjacks from the South dealing in drugs and contraband – ran into me by accident.

BRUNO: A transaction gone awry.

RILEY: Yeah. The pills. Knife out for the throat. I ducked. Close call.

BRUNO: Thanks for that.

RILEY: To sum up: random bullet to the head, knife out for the throat. Both missed. By a hair. By the width of a thought.

BRUNO: The bleeding 's stopped.

RILEY: Just grazed me. I don't think it was aimed at me, it was aimed at the Speaker, a prick of a guy with an orange head. Here's the thing: They have elaborate plans, these people, and lots of money from the billionaire midgets, the Silicon fat cats, to take over the State once and for all and straighten it out permanently. Tax free. And so, you and I will have to go.

BRUNO: Where to?

RILEY: I don't know. The Carpathians maybe.

BRUNO: Riley?

RILEY: Yeah?

BRUNO: Something strange happened. I heard the trains.

RILEY: You told me.

BRUNO: And then I had spasms. I was sitting here listening to the sounds of the riot, and then the trains, and I spasmed. And then I quieted down. I felt a kind of listening silence. And then I heard my own voice calling me. BRUNO. It was me, but I was silent. It was my own voice calling to me.

RILEY: Nightmare?

BRUNO: Scary. A call from the Deep. To be there when I die.
Wait – *(A SOLDIER appears in a glowing uniform. Shiny shoes and buttons and ribbons, a handsome lad, crisp and straight.)*

SOLDIER: Bruno?

BRUNO: Yes?

SOLDIER: I'm here to tell you.

BRUNO: Who are you?

SOLDIER: A messenger from the authorities.

BRUNO: You see him, Riley?

RILEY: I see him. He must have followed me.

BRUNO: Where'd you come from?

SOLDIER: Headquarters.

RILEY: Where's that?

SOLDIER: Outside.

BRUNO: What's the message?

SOLDIER: Renounce and recover.

RILEY: Did you say *romance* and recover?

SOLDIER: No.

RILEY: Another proposition altogether.

SOLDIER: *Renounce* and recover.

RILEY: Forget about it.

SOLDIER: Last days, plain and simple.

RILEY: Come on.

SOLDIER: Why don't you convert?

BRUNO: My grandmother would turn over in her grave. May her name be for a blessing.

SOLDIER: Do you believe in G-d?

RILEY: No.

SOLDIER: Not you. Bruno?

BRUNO: What do you mean by G-d?

SOLDIER: A bright light will appear in the sky, a symbol for the righteous to prepare to rise.

BRUNO: Renounce and recover?

SOLDIER: Yes.

BRUNO: Forget about it.

SOLDIER: Last chance.

BRUNO: Arthritis in both hips, ruptured discs in my back, high blood pressure and diabetes.

SOLDIER: Too bad.

RILEY: Plus COPD.

BRUNO: I'm not going anywhere.

RILEY: Ha, ha.

SOLDIER: Insulin?

BRUNO: Of course.

SOLDIER: Prescriptions?

BRUNO: Yes. And I don't feel guilty.

RILEY: Why should you feel guilty?

BRUNO: I don't know why. Something Freudian. Something in childhood.

RILEY: Think.

BRUNO: Survivor's guilt.

RILEY: There you go.

SOLDIER: Be nice and I'll see to it.

BRUNO: Yeah? Like what?

SOLDIER: Prescriptions on time, anxiety free. No more wild hallucinations in the night. No more twitching or nervous fiddling.

RILEY: Hold up there, mister.

SOLDIER: No crying out in the silence of the night –

RILEY: That's enough.

SOLDIER: Imagery from another dimension, endless, frightening, uncanny, as though the brain cracked open, and all the worlds' nightmares rushed in.

BRUNO: Oh, no.

SOLDIER: Am I right?

BRUNO: He's right.

RILEY: Tou never told me.

BRUNO: It's hard to explain. If I don't get my meds. If I fuck up the timing --

SOLDIER: This world and the next. This life and another's. And one more thing.

BRUNO: Yeah? What's that?

SOLDIER: Jews will not replace us.

RILEY: You said that.

SOLDIER: I never said that.

RILEY: You don't remember.

SOLDIER: We'll take your money, thank you very much.

RILEY: Fuck off.

SOLDIER: And your Jewels. And we'll burn all the Jewish books in the universe, in all the dimensions.

RILEY: Once again – go fuck yourself.

SOLDIER: We bring a religious Revival in the American tradition, a reawakening.

RILEY: Good career choice. They made a lot of dough those guys. Raspy preachers fleecing the yahoos.

SOLDIER: Drugs and alcohol.

RILEY: Is what?

SOLDIER: Forbidden. Definitely. You know, the situation, anxiety and tension and weird calls in the night and twitching and sighing –

BRUNO: Is what?

SOLDIER: You could spend years in the nuthouse. In the loony-bin, in an asylum, in a monastery on a far-away mountain, or a hole in the ground, a tunnel, an Islamic tunnel in the desert --

RILEY: Enough already.

SOLDIER: I'm here to tell you.

RILEY: Who the fuck are you?

SOLDIER: I'm an Officer of the Law.

RILEY: The Law?

SOLDIER: The New White Christian dispensation.

RILEY: You look like a tin soldier.

SOLDIER: I'm not talking to you.

RILEY: You look like a toy.

SOLDIER: Bruno?

BRUNO: Yes?

RILEY: You look like a child's idea of a soldier. Yeah. Not real. Yeah. Can't shoot straight and hampered by a tiny pecker.

SOLDIER: Shut up.

RILEY: Uncircumcised dickhead. I can tell by your puny emanation. No bite to the bark, so to say.

BRUNO: He survived a bullet.

RILEY: I survived a bullet. I'm a local hero.

BRUNO: He's a local hero.

SOLDIER: Our God will strike you where you stand.

RILEY: Your God be damned. You're a bunch of fascist dummies and I hope you all die.

SOLDIER: Those are sinful thoughts.

RILEY: Oh, come on.

SOLDIER: You will be heard. You will be watched.

BRUNO: How so?

SOLDIER: Taps on your phone, eyes in the sky.

RILEY: You must be kidding.

SOLDIER: Not kidding.

BRUNO: It's illegal.

SOLDIER: You will be stamped with the mark of Satan.

RILEY: Blow on him, Bruno.

BRUNO: Go back where you came from.

RILEY: The poisoned atmosphere, clouded with mental illness and falling debris.

SOLDIER: Slow down.

RILEY: Stratosphere of dead souls.

BRUNO: Weeping for their lost ones here on Earth.

RILEY: Like dying stars.

BRUNO: Supernova!

SOLDIER: Listen up.

RILEY: Narcissi maniacs bouncing balls around.

BRUNO: Yeah!

RILEY: Bouncing around like rubber balls!

BRUNO: Yes!

SOLDIER: Listen up -- I bring a new dispensation.

RILEY: You said that already.

SOLDIER: Be quiet.

RILEY: Don't threaten me – I'm a child of Appalachia and I went to Yale.

BRUNO: He's only kidding.

SOLDIER: Be nice.

BRUNO: Or what?

SOLDIER: I'll bring your liquor and your dope. Ease the torments of isolation.

BRUNO: Appreciate it.

SOLDIER: I ran into your friend here cringing in an alley.

RILEY: Yeah, yeah.

SOLDIER: I spared him and granted his plea.

RILEY: Fake news. He missed.

SOLDIER: Forgiveness for being lost in the maelstrom of his imagination.

RILEY: Knife at my throat.

SOLDIER: Failure to renounce Evil. For we are living now in a New World Order.

BRUNO: Oh, for goodness' sake.

RILEY: I'm a folk legend in my own time.

SOLDIER: Nonsense.

RILEY: I was at the Battle of Charlottesville and survived.

BRUNO: He's a local hero.

SOLDIER: *Jews will not replace us.*

BRUNO: That's the third time you said that.

RILEY: Maybe it was History, sharpening its claws.

BRUNO: Take it back.

RILEY: Was the slogan of the day. White boys wearing shorts and carrying torches. Explain that why don't you.

SOLDIER: History will explain it.

RILEY: History is over. The nightmare is over. History ended with the mass murder of a third of the Jewish people.

BRUNO: I must agree.

RILEY: No history, no God. They've put the golden calf out there and worship it with bloody sacrifice. Jewish children turned into cookies. For crazy white people. Evolution took a wrong turn right there.

SOLDIER: Tell your friend to sit down and be quiet.

RILEY: We're not even one percent of the population.

SOLDIER: I won't tell you what you need to know.

RILEY: It's insane.

SOLDIER: Mr. Riley.

RILEY: Yeah?

SOLDIER: You're not invited to the Rise., so you need to move out of the way. Pronto.

RILEY: You got people out there can't write their own names who are armed and lethal and profoundly stupid. Let them rise. I'm not moving.

BRUNO: Me neither.

SOLDIER: You are not invited. Just get out of the way.

RILEY: No.

SOLDIER: We are trying to be nice, but we have tanks and bulldozers and armored trains that can do the job.

RILEY: Fuck you. I could blow on you and you'd disappear. Back Into the violent shitty world you came out of. Like the dragons of old.

SOLDIER: Too bad they missed. Had one clean shot. Name's George, a hayseed nerd, he's gone now, we threw him down a well.

RILEY: How nice.

SOLDIER: We don't have time for jerks like him. We gave him his shot and that was that. He was enthusiastic. I'll say that for him. But that's not enough. A happy clown with an AR 15.

BRUNO: Down a well. Jeez.

SOLDIER: I see your wound is headed. Like magic.

RILEY: Never happened.

SOLDIER: I saw it on TV.

RILEY: Fake. Bruno?

BRUNO: Yeah?

RILEY: Give him a shove. *(Shove)*

SOLDIER: *My leader is the Anti-Christ.*

RILEY: Uh, oh.

BRUNO: Felt squishy, like a cow's liver.

SOLDIER: *A super-con. Murder and mayhem follow when he appears on earth.*

RILEY: Let's kill this motherfucker.

BRUNO: Let's do it. Let's strangle him. *(They try. He eludes them, as though made of air.)*

RILEY: Jeez.

BRUNO: *(Gasping)* I'm out of breath.

RILEY: We must be dreaming.

BRUNO: It's quiet outside.

SOLDIER: We have a new God now and a new republic, I'm here to tell you.

RILEY: Say What?

SOLDIER: I said already.

RILEY: Say again.

SOLDIER: Pack up and move on.

BRUNO: No.

RILEY: Where to?

SOLDIER: The Carpathian Mountains.

RILEY: Say again.

SOLDIER: Good news is on the way!

RILEY: We hit the button!

BRUNO: He's a robot!

RILEY: Slap him. *(Slap)* Good! Slap him again! *(Slap)*

SOLDIER: The Ten Commandments remain the same. A tip of the cap to the Hebrews, once a war-like tribe wandering the desert. Moses was an Egyptian, of course. He learned the one God there. Creates the foundation for a new way of living. We are grateful for that.

RILEY: Get lost.

SOLDIER: We are not barbarians.

BRUNO: Yes, you are.

RILEY: Automatons, to a man.

SOLDIER: We have won, and it's time to make new arrangements.

RILEY: I should never have gone out there.

BRUNO: It's not my fault.

RILEY: I never said it was.

SOLDIER: There it is, the appearance of conscience, thanks to the Jews, which cracks the will and paralyzes initiative.

RILEY: Say again?

SOLDIER: Get bad feelings out of the way, grease the wheels of business.

RILEY: Bruno.

SOLDIER: Transactions.

BRUNO: Riley?

SOLDIER: Transactions.

RILEY: Get rid of this toy soldier.

BRUNO: How?

RILEY: Blow on him.

SOLDIER: And you brought Communism into the world.

BRUNO: Me?

SOLDIER: Plus, fake psychology and fake physics. You people.

BRUNO: The Jewish people?

SOLDIER: It's okay. Let's go forward now with a clean slate and hope for the future.

RILEY: Pull his plug.

SOLDIER: We will have a transactable society, crisp and clean, based on hard work and Christian values. *(Sound)*

BRUNO: What's that sound?

RILEY: Sounds like they are nailing people to two by fours.

SOLDIER: Transactions. Christian values.

RILEY: There's a thought – nail him to the wall.

SOLDIER: Don't touch me!

RILEY: Find a hammer.

SOLDIER: You'll regret it.

RILEY: He's right. His guts will fall out and his dying breath alone will stink up our household for generations to come.

SOLDIER: I'm leaving now.

RILEY: Bye, bye.

SOLDIER: Call me if you need me, Bruno.

BRUNO: Why? I don't even know you.

SOLDIER: You find it harder to get up in the morning, get into your day. You feel weak and sick and there's piss in your pajamas and you can't walk, and you've lost the moral high ground and are miserably defeated by our party's poetical success. I mean *pollical* success. Am I right?

BRUNO: Go away.

SOLDIER: Leave a message at Party headquarters. Tell them Joe sent you.

BRUNO: Don't come back.

SOLDIER: We're here to stay, don't you know. We've won. After decades of struggle and martyrdom, we've won. Purity of mind and soul, obedience and diligence. We're the party of the people, of a vibrant Church awaiting its cosmic fulfillment, The Ascension of Man.

RILEY: What's that?

BRUNO: What the hell is he talking about?

RILEY: I don't think he's real.

BRUNO: It's like the dawn of the planet of the Apes.

SOLDIER: Goodbye. *(Exits)*

RILEY: Don't come back!

BRUNO: I think we were dreaming.

RILEY: We can't both have been dreaming the same dream.

BRUNO: Were we?

RILEY: What do you think?

BRUNO: I don't know what to think.

RILEY: Who could make up all that shit?

BRUNO: Maybe you shouldn't have ventured out into the mayhem.

RILEY: Maybe not.

BRUNO: Was he a robot or a messenger from the religious right?

RILEY: A robot.

BRUNO: Where's the paper bag?

RILEY: There is no paper bag.

BRUNO: Oh, no!

RILEY: You heard what I heard?

BRUNO: Yes. Everything is hunky-dory, thoughts and prayers and no complaints. Lynchings for an afternoon of fun. Tossing malingerers down wells. Throwing commies out of helicopters. A new World Order. They'll get rid of the history books and the Jews and the poets and start over.

RILEY: Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.

BRUNO: Praise the Lord and get ready to fly.

RILEY: Where to?

BRUNO: Heaven, my friend, in the prime of life.

RILEY: Not for me.

BRUNO: I thought it was personal, from another dimension.

RILEY: Not to me it wasn't.

BRUNO: Another level.

RILEY: We'll need resistance, Bruno, starting now. We'll need to contact the others. Poets like us, banding together, Armed men in the woods. Sabotage. Propaganda. Cells of resistance in all the towns and cities of the land.

BRUNO: Now you're dreaming.

RILEY: Come with me, Bruno.

BRUNO: Where to?

RILEY: We'll get on a bus.

BRUNO: I don't think so.

RILEY: Why not?

BRUNO: I don't ride buses.

RILEY: Yeah, we'll go to Mexico and start our resistance movement there.

BRUNO: No, I rode a bus one time from Mexico City to New York City and I'll never do that again.

RILEY: We'll hole up at the border, around Mexicali.

BRUNO: I can hardly walk no more.

RILEY: Use a wheelchair.

BRUNO: I will not.

RILEY: Too proud? Too vain?

BRUNO: Consider this:

RILEY: Yeah?

BRUNO: They are rounding them up, all the immigrants, legal and illegal, and busing them to Mexico. Or taking them up for a ride in airplanes and dropping them onto the Gulf. Soon it'll be the poets and the anarchists, feeding the sharks.

RILEY: Uh, oh. *(Re-Enter SOLDIER.)*

BRUNO: What?

RILEY: It's him again.

BRUNO: I don't see him. *(SOLDIER bangs his walking stick.)*

SOLDIER: You see me now?

RILEY: Go fuck yourself.

SOLDIER: Uncanny, isn't it? A con artist comes to power as an icon for the Christian Religion. Not unheard of, I suppose, in the modern world.

RILEY: I can't stand this.

SOLDIER: Can you see me now?

BRUNO: No.

SOLDIER: Can you see me now?

BRUNO: No.

RILEY: What do you want?

SOLDIER: Well, I wanted to discuss the new reality on the ground with you two fellows –

RILEY: No way.

SOLDIER: -- Of the Hebraic tradition..

RILEY: What is there to discuss?

SOLDIER: Let's start with the new reality. Time to get with the program.

BRUNO: What happened to my dope?

SOLDIER: What dope?

BRUNO: Never mind.

RILEY: We are not junkies.

BRUNO: We are poets.

SOLDIER: There'll be no place for poets in the new world. Well, maybe a small one, for propaganda reasons.

BRUNO: We're not available.

He is not real. He is a hologram.

BRUNO: Touch him, see if he feels it.

SOLDIER: Touch me and you will disintegrate on the spot.

BRUNO: Don't try it, Riley.

SOLDIER: You will disintegrate, not I.

BRUNO: He's a hologram.

SOLDIER: You will need to find new roles in our new society. Like I said, explaining things to the citizenry.

RILEY: I hope the earth cracks open, and Alabama, Tennessee, and Idaho fall into the fiery chasm and disappear.

BRUNO: Don't rile him up. Riley.

RILEY: Ha! And Montana. And all the cowboys and cops and preachers and firemen fall in after them.

SOLDIER: What a day we had today! Historic!

BRUNO: A riot.

RILEY: People were shot and hanged and trampled to death. Others had their throats cut.

SOLDIER: No, no, Riley, don't make things up.

RILEY: I saw it with my own eyes.

SOLDIER: Only Negroes and spics and communists and dwarfs.

RILEY: Hit the piece of shit with a baseball bat.

BRUNO: Okay. (*RILEY swings and misses.*)

SOLDIER: A baseball bat. So American. Clear rules, winners and losers. We'll have prayers in the schools and in the factories and government offices and in the Army and National Guard. Christian warriors, upright and fierce. So, I'd Walk the line if I were you.

RILEY: Or what?

SOLDIER: We'll dispense with you. We'll prosecute you in our courts, We'll lock you up. And if you give us too much trouble, we'll eliminate you quickly and efficiently. You won't know what hit you. Ha, ha.

BRUNO: What a creep. Hit him again. (*RILEY swings and misses.*)

SOLDIER: Think of it—a white, Christian nation standing tall among nations. Unified and armed to the teeth. One nation, indivisible.

BRUNO: We are Jewish.

SOLDIER: Non-believers in jail or deported.

RILEY: I don't think so.

BRUNO: We have a lot to live up to.

SOLDIER: There'll be a war, you know, it's already started, between the Persians and the Jews. It's a sign and a portent.

BRUNO: Of what?

SOLDIER: The Second Coming. Go outside, look and listen. Signs and portents. Thousands, no millions, of Americans united in Christ.

RILEY: Oh, my G-d.

SOLDIER: Preparing the way, clearing a Path.

RILEY: Murder and mayhem.

SOLDIER: Here's the deal: convert or die. There are renounce and recover stations all over the country. No charges or fees. You just sign up, free to go.

RILEY: It's the fucking Inquisition all over again.

SOLDIER: They had the right idea. They succeeded. Carriages of the deported lined up around the Mediterranean Sea. Dispersed. A surge of population Eastward and then North to those shithole towns and villages wiped out by the Germans.

BRUNO: Riley.

RILEY: Yeah.

BRUNO: I feel spooked.

RILEY: So, do I

BRUNO: I feel frightened.

RILEY: He can't live long. He's an apparition.

SOLDIER: A monumental Historical Event had occurred.

RILEY: He's imaginary.

SOLDIER: Great lineages of Conversos remained. In Italy and Spain, in Portugal and France, I won't mention names, the backbone of Europe. We can have good relations with those people. From a distance. From across the sea. We are a nation above nations. We are blessed by the Lord.

RILEY: He's unhinged.

SOLDIER: Safe forever behind two vast oceans. But now we must get our own house in order. And so --- excuse me.

RILEY: He's fading fast.

SOLDIER: Best to listen to me while I'm still here. I am your Savior. I could shoot someone dead on fifth Ave in broad daylight and not a finger would touch me for it. And that includes you, of course. You are two-bit players, no accounts, losers. One of you is a criminal and a dirty dog, the other, an outcast, is about to die.

BRUNO: Just one minute.

RILEY: What the fuck! How could this carnival bogeyman con so many marks?

BRUNO: He's entertaining.

SOLDIER: I'm white. I never went to church. But I heard a call. Prepare the way it said, for the coming of the Lord. And I began my mission.

RILEY: A psychopath.

BRUNO: Nasty.

SOLDIER: I give them false hope. No, I'm telling everyone and I'm telling you -- get on the train to paradise!

BRUNO: Train to Hell.

SOLDIER: It comes through me. I am the messenger. Last chance.

RILEY: Let's kill him. A bullet in his head.

The train is leaving the station.

BRUNO: We don't want any.

BRUNO: We're not going anywhere.

SOLDIER: I'm wasting my time here. Wise up. You won't know what hit you. A tsunami of terror. A volcanic explosion of vengeance. And you'll be gone, gone. Mark my fucking words. *(Exits)*

BRUNO: He's gone.

RILEY: Was he real?

BRUNO: I am not a criminal or a dirty dog.

RILEY: Maybe imaginary.

BRUNO: Look.

RILEY: Where?

BRUNO: There's blood on the floor. You must have hit him.

RILEY: I hope he dies.

BRUNO: Now what?

RILEY: I must get moving.

BRUNO: Where to?

RILEY: I need to organize.

BRUNO: Good.

RILEY: Get our people together and plan.

BRUNO: Stay off the main roads. Avoid the Christian soldiers. Shoot first, as my mother used to say.

RILEY: Yeah. I was thinking synagogues, but there probably aren't any. We shall see. And we have caches of arms and ammunition.

BRUNO: I wish I could join you.

RILEY: We'll keep in touch.

BRUNO: Yeah, yeah.

RILEY: Be well. *(Exits)*

BRUNO: It's so American. Walls and barbed wire. Bullhorns. Lies. Prison camps, AR 15s. Imagine. A theocracy with a conman, a huckster, running the show, evil billionaires telling him what to say, what to do. Whites only. Women enslaved. Poets banned. So. Get your papers in order. There might be a knock on your door. I don't know what else to say now. Riley will do his best; I think he'll have his victories. Wish him well. *(Long silence.)*

BRUNO: (Off:) Bruno!

Looks up. A light shines on him.

Black out.

Murray Mednick

8/24

