STICK THIS ON TOP OF EVERYBODY ELSE'S MEMOS.

The Red Pumpkin

fall, 1982, Barry H.

Honorable Mention, Playwriting Division, 1983 ~~Kraan~~ Kenan Awards.

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Set: The play takes place in the living room of a middle-class family Halloween night.

Characters:

Peter: An eighteen-year-old boy. He is very intelligent, and now, in the fall of his senior year in high school, everyone is pestering him to choose a career.

Mom: Peter's mother. She is afraid that Peter is going to waste his intelligence, so she is putting a lot of pressure on Peter.

Aristotle MMCCCLVI: a Pompous, overbearing, highly philosophical pumpkin who guides Peter through the trials and traumas of growing up and choosing a place in society.

(As the scene opens, PETER is typing in the living room. The stage is dimly lit to give an eerie feeling, except for a brightly lit table on the center of the stage. The table is empty as of now. There is a knock at the door, which is offstage, stage left.)

MOM: (from offstage, stage right) Peter, will you answer the door? (Peter continues to type) Peter? (Peter still types. MOM enters from off stage, stage right) Are you deaf? Can't you hear the knocking?

PETER: (concentrating on his typing) Uh-huh.

MOM: (sarcastically) "Uh-huh" you're deaf or "uh-huh" you can't hear the door?

PETER: (still concentrating on his typing) Uh-huh.

(MOM goes offstage, stage left, to answer the door. Several voices shout "trick-or-treat")

MOM: (artificially) Oh my! Aren't you frightening? (PETER reacts to this as if disgusted) Here's some candy for you and you and you.

VOICES: Thank you?

MOM: You're all very welcome. Bye-bye!

(MOM returns to the stage with a Jack-O-Lantern in her hand. The pumpkin is lit by a candle inside so that the face is glowing. She sets this on the highly-lit table in the center of the stage)

MOM: Well another Halloween has come and gone.

PETER: (typing) Uh-huh.

MOM: We aren't communicating are we?

PETER: (typing) Uh-huh.

MOM: Did you fill out your college applications tonight?

PETER: Uh-huh.

MOM: (relieved) Good. So now what are you typing?

PETER: (showing some true interest) Articles for the school magazine.

MOM: Oh. (pause) You know, Peter, I really don't think you should spend all of your time doing <u>that</u> stuff. You have more important things that you should by worrying about.

PETER: (typing) Yeah. Like deadlines.

MOM: That's right! You have to send those applications off soon or--

PETER: (staring at MOM) I meant deadlines for the school paper.

MOM: (upset) Oh. Well don't stay up late, you have school tomorrow.

PETER: Uh-huh. Goodnight Mom.

MOM: Goodnight, Peter. (exits offstage, stage right. Peter expresses a sigh of relief, then continues to type)

ARISTOTLE: "The time has come," his mentor said,
"To talk of many things:
Of pens, and ink, and many words,
Of books and magazines,
And why his temper's boiling hot,
And whether pigs have wings."

(During this speech, PETER has continued typing. Now he looks around the room suspiciously. Upon seeing no one, he resumes his frantic typing)

ARISTOTLE: Look at him go ... the writer extraordinaire!

PETER: There is no one else in this room...

ARISTOTLE: Faster than a speeding secretary...

PETER: Therefore, there can be no voice...

ARISTOTLE: More powerful than an IBM selectric...

PETER: Ergo, I'm going crazy...

ARISTOTLE: Able to leap from key to key in a single bound!

PETER: Better still, I am crazy.

ARISTOTLE: Ah! He calls himself a writer, but what he lacks is imagination.

PETER: (looking towards the ceiling) I have an imagination.

ARISTOTLE: Tell me, Peter, do pigs have wings?

PETER: Show yourself, dammit!

ARISTOTLE: Oh how very valiant! Just like in the movies. I suppose if they ever make a film of your autobiography, they'll sign Harrison Ford to play your part.

(PETER rises, trying to find the source of the mysterious voice)

ARISTOTLE: And with that, the great Peter Stone begins his search for his arch-rival. He hunts high and low in the fashionable middle class living room, and still he cannot find him. Suddenly, there's a clue. He slithers towards the table in the center of the room and finds --

PETER: A pumpkin.

ARISTOTLE: Very good. You've just won two complimentary tickets to my funeral.

PETER: I don't believe this.

ARISTOTLE: C'mon, Peter. You told me you had an imagination. Why don't you use it?

PETER: I don't understand.

ARISTOTLE: I must warn you that curiosity killed the cantaloupe. But something tells me that we'll manage.

PETER: I don't know what to say.

ARISTOTLE: I'd say that introductions are in order.

PETER: How does one address a pumpkin?

ARISTOTLE: By his name, of course.

PETER: Which is?

ARISTOTLE: Aristotle M-Mack-ack-ack-el-vee.

PETER: That's one helluva last name. How do you spell it?

ARISTOTLE: M-M-C-C-C-L-V-I.

PETER: That's nonsense.

ARISTOTLE: That is NOT nonsense. That happens to he Latin for two thousand, three hundred, fifty-six.

PETER: What kind of name is that?

ARISTOTLE: My kind. One based in family tradition.

PETER: You have family?

ARISTOTLE: Of course. I don't believe the theory of spontaneous generation holds much weight anymore.

PETER: Unless you use a little imagination.

ARISTOTLE: Naturally. Anyway, my great-times-two-thousand-three-hundred-fifty-four-grand-father, Aristotle the First, revealed himself to a young man in Greece quite a few years back. That Greek, by the way, happened to name his son after my distant relative.

PETER: Are you telling me that your extremely-great-grandfather knew Aristotle, the Greek philosopher?

ARISTOTLE: No. I'm telling you that he knew Aristotle's father, the janitor at the parthenon. Sometimes we don't reveal ourselves to the cream of the crop. They don't need our help. Which brings us to you.

PETER: Me?

ARISTOTLE: Yes, Peter. You. You see, every once-in-awhile, us pumpkins like to pounce on some unsuspecting fellow like yourself and guide them through a time of trouble.

PETER: (defiantly) What makes you think I'm having a time of trouble?

ARISTOTLE: The way you act towards your mother...the way you ignore her...the way you lie to her...

PETER: (startled) I do not lie to my mother.

ARISTOTLE: No. You twist the truth like a pretzel, and cover it in the mustard of literary genius.

PETER: I do NOT lie to my mother!

ARISTOTLE: Then why did you tell her that you filled out your applications for school, when you know damn well that you didn't?

PETER: (resigned) Because I wasn't in the mood for another argument.

ARISTOTLE: Always on your back, is she? Tries to make sure that you fare well in life, does she? What a pity.

PETER: It's not that simple.

ARISTOTLE: Nothing in life is simple...with the possible exception of the watermelon.

PETER: She wants me to be a lawyer...

ARISTOTLE: And you don't want to be.

PETER: I'm not sure yet.

ARISTOTLE: I suppose you want to be a writer.

PETER: No, I want to be the janitor at the parthenon.

ARISTOLE: Oh, very good. Perhaps I can put in a good word for you.

PETER: Perhaps.

ARISTOTLE: Tell me more about this lawyer business.

PETER: Well, I've always wanted to go to college, ever since I can remember. I think it's because I've watched my father run his store for years. He's trapped behind the counter, stifled, you know? I have never wanted to grow up and take over the family business, that's for sure!

ARISTOTLE: I can see that you value your family tradition highly.

PETER: I didn't mean it that way. I've always felt that he did it all so that I could have the opportunity to do better. Anyway, back when I had to pick a high school, I chose a pretty competitive college prep school.

ARISTOTLE: Needless to say, you've received a good education.

PETER: Sure. The problem is that my definition of success and the school's definition are a bit apart. If you have any brains at all, they try to push you towards professional school. You know. Anybody can be an artist or an accountant, or a teacher. So if you have the

brains, why waste your life in a job anybody can do?

ARISTOTLE: Don't they know that man cannot live by law and medicine alone?

PETER: No. And they've convinced my mother of that also.

ARISTOTLE: Ah, I see.

PETER: It's like a curse. Once you've proven you can do the work, it becomes one expectation after another. Now they all expect me to do what <u>they</u> want me to do.

ARISTOTLE: The question is, what do <u>you</u> want to do?

PETER: Pardon me?

ARISTOTLE: I said, the question is what do <u>you</u> want to do?

PETER: Do you realize you're the first person--

ARISTOTLE: Pumpkin.

PETER: Sorry. Do you realize you're the first pumpkin to ever ask me that?

ARISTOTLE: Do you realize how ridiculous your last statement was? The point is that you live your life. No one else does it for you. You have to choose your path.

PETER: That's easy for you to say. You don't live with my mother.

ARISTOTLE: A real pain in the asparagus, is she.

PETER: You said a mouthful. All I ever hear is "You better not watse your life on some dream."

ARISTOTLE: And what does your father think of all this?

PETER: He seems to be indifferent, but he's not. He just wants me to do well in whatever I do. He never really says it, though.

ARISTOTLE: In other words, one good chicken deserves another.

PETER: (irritated) Just what is that supposed to mean?

ARISTOTLE: It seems that you are both afraid of the same woman. Your mother might as well live both your lives as well as her own.

PETER: That's not really true.

ARISTOTLE: Why, then, do niether of you have the courage to say that it is not necessary for you to become a lawyer in order to be successful?

PETER: I'm going to tell her.

ARISTOTLE: When? When you graduate with your degree in journalism?

PETER: Soon.

ARISTOTLE: You're running out of time, Peter. You have deadlines to meet.

(At this point, MOM calls from her bedroom offstage, stage right.)

MOM: Peter. It's awfully late. Who are you talking to?

PETER: (stammering) Uh...I...uh...I called Paul about something in his article.

ARISTOTLE: Tell her now.

MOM: Oh. Okay. Don't stay up much longer, you hear?

ARISTOTLE: Tell her, Mister Perdue.

PETER: Now?

ARISTOTLE: Yes. Now.

PETER: (calling to MOM) Mom?

MOM: Yes Peter?

PETER: Uh...Mom?

MOM: Yes, Peter. What is it?

PETER: I just wanted to tell you that (pause)...that I think we should have chicken for dinner tomorrow night.

ARISTOTLE: Turkey!

PETER: I mean turkey.

ARISTOTLE: I meant you.

MOM: Fine. Goodnight.

ARISTOTLE: I loved the way you handled her. You were incredible. Dinner tomorrow should be very good.

PETER: I'll talk to her tomorrow. She's horrible to look at when she's not wearing any makeup.

ARISTOTLE: I see. Or should I say I will see?

PETER: You'll see.

ARISTOTLE: By the way. There's a question I've been trying to ask you.

PETER: Which is?

ARISTOTLE: Do pigs have wings?

PETER: What?

ARISTOTLE: Do pigs have wings? Can't you even answer a simple, basic question?

PETER: That's absurd.

ARISTOTLE: So is talking to a pumpkin. Now answer, please.

PETER: No. Pigs do not have wings.

ARISTOTLE: What a shame.

PETER: Pardon?

ARISTOTLE: And you showed such promise too.

PETER: I don't understand.

ARISTOTLE: Peter, the fact that you've never seen something is not proof that it doesn't exist. If a pig with wings had come here tonight and asked you if pumpkins talked, you would have said "No". But you would have been wrong. Anything can exist in one's imagination. Who's to say that Wonderland wasn't real for Lewis Carroll? Surely neither of us can make that claim.

PETER: I don't see--

ARISTOTLE: A writer's greatest gift is his ability to create...really create... images in which others can believe. But you have to believe in those people and places yourself in order to make them real. Agreed?

PETER: Agreed, but--

ARISTOTLE: Peter. Do you believe in yourself?

PETER: What?

ARISTOTLE: Do you believe that you can be a writer? I think self-doubt has made you afraid to commit yourself to anything.

PETER: That's not entirely--

ARISTOTLE: Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater, had a choice and couldn't make it.

PETER: (irritated) You're just like the rest of them, aren't you? Press, press, press!

ARISTOTLE: The point is, that no matter who is pressing, and which way they are pushing you, you rebel.

PETER: Don't you understand? I'm not ready to decide. I have the opportunity to do anything I choose. But the choice I make now affects my entire life.

ARISTOTLE: Does it? Anton Checkov was a doctor long before he was a writer. There is always room for change, if you believe in yourself. What are you so afraid of?

PETER: I'm afraid of failing. I'm afraid of choosing the wrong career. So many people expect so much out of me. There are a thousand eyes on me, and if I fail (pause)...I don't know if I can be a lawyer. There's so much work involved.

ARISTOTLE: There's work involved in anything of value.

PETER: Actually, it's not the work I'm afraid of. It's the risk.

ARISTOTLE: In writing? In practicing law? In both? Your problem seems to be that you doubt you can be a lawyer, or a writer, or an Indian chief. You have to believe that you can do something before you <u>can</u> do it. Your argument isn't with your mother, you school, or your pumpkin. It's with yourself.

PETER: I just need more time to decide.

ARISTOTLE: Parents, guidance counselors, and college admissions boards might grow impatient, but if you're not ready to decide, they will have to accept that.

PETER: But they expect so much so quickly.

ARISTOTLE: Believe me, they'll get just what they expect if they give you room to grow: a successful man. Perhaps you should tell them the same things you've told me. Maybe they'll understand.

MOM: (offstage) Peter, are you still on the phone?

PETER: (stammers) Uh...yes.

ARISTOTLE: Now is the time to talk to her.

PETER: We tried this before.

ARISTOTLE: But we didn't have anything to say to her, did we?

PETER: Mom?

MOM: Yes?

PETER: Could you come here for a second, please?

MOM: (enters) Make it quick. It's very late.

PETER: Sit down...(she sits) We have to talk.

MOM: Better late than never.

PETER: Exactly my point. Mom, I've made some decisions about school.

MOM: What are you going to major in now? Greek art?

PETER: Actually, I've decided that I'm undecided.

MOM: Very cute.

PETER: You're making it difficult for me to talk to you.

MOM: And you're making it difficult for me to smile.

PETER: Cut the shit, okay? What I'm trying to say is very important.

MOM: Peter--

PETER: Listen. You and dad have given me the opportunity to do anything that I want to do. There are a million possible options, most of which I don't even know about. And now you want me to choose. I'm not ready to choose. I might want to be a writer, a lawyer, or an Indian chief...(he glances at Aristotle). But in the end, if you give me some room to grow, I'll be doing what I want to do. And I'll be happy...(pause). The floor is open for discussion.

MOM: There doesn't appear to be much to discuss. It seems you've already made up your mind.

PETER: That's right. I've made up my mind; I want to pick my career, not get pushed into one.

MOM: I know I've been pushing you lately, but your guidance counselor called because he was concerned about you. He said you seemed to have lost your desire to go to college.

PETER: I want to go to college. You know that. I just don't know what I want to do when I get there. In fact, I'm going to fill out all my applications first thing tomorrow.

MOM: I thought you said you filled them out tonight?

PETER: Well...I...

MOM: You lied to me.

PETER: No. I twisted the truth. But I won't do it anymore...(pause). If you promise not to put so much pressure on me.

MOM: I promise. Goodnight...(MOM begins to leave the room)

PETER: Goodnight, Mom.

MOM: (Pauses just before leaving the stage. Turns towards PETER) Perhaps you could be both a writer and a lawyer. You are allowed to do that, aren't you?

PETER: Do pigs have wings? Do pumpkins talk?

MOM: Does that mean you're not allowed?

PETER: Oh, Mom. Use your imagination. Of course I can do both.

MOM: Then there's still a chance--

PETER: Don't push, Mom. You promised.

MOM: I'm sorry. Don't stay up much longer...(she exits, speaks from offstage) And make sure all the lights are out when you go to bed.

ARISTOTLE: A stunning performance, my ex-Mister Perdue. You're not such a chicken after all.

PETER: She didn't look very happy.

ARISTOTLE: Trust me when I say she'll think about what you've said all night. By tomorrow afternoon, she'll have told all her friends what you've said, and what a man you are, and the news will spread like leprosy. In a week she'll speak to <u>you</u>...maybe. But in a few years, she'll be proud to call you her son.

PETER: You make it sound so pleasant.

ARISTOTLE: The important thing is that you've gotten it off your chest. Now you can concern yourself with the important things.

PETER: Like deadlines?

ARISTOTLE: Exactly.

PETER: I read you loud and clear.

ARISTOTLE: Good. Believe in yourself, and others will believe in you too.

PETER: Well, it's getting awfully late. I'd better get some sleep, I have a busy day ahead of me tomorrow.

ARISTOTLE: So do I.

PETER: Really? You have plans? (PETER chuckles)

ARISTOTLE: (mystically) Not really. But others do, and I'm not an upstart.

PETER: Oh. (heading offstage, stage right) Well, I'll see you tomorrow. (Turns to leave. Pauses. Turns toward ARISTOTLE) Thanks for everything.

ARISTOTLE: There's really no need to thank me. I was just a catalyst. The important stuff has been here all along.

PETER: True.

ARISTOTLE: That's what I like. A man who believes in himself.

PETER: Goodnight, Aristotle.

ARISTOTLE: Goodbye, Peter. And good luck.

(PETER shuts off the living room lights. Only the spotlight on ARISTOTLE remains lit. That light slowly fades until only the candle within ARISTOTLE remians burning. PETER has left the stage, and ARISTOTLE speaks only to the audience)

ARISTOTLE: "I weep for you," young Peter said:
"I deeply sympathize."
With sobs and tears he sorted out
The largest of the pies.
Holding his pocket handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

"Aristotle," said young Peter
"You've had a pleasant run.
I wish that you were here again."
But answer came there none.
And this was scarcely odd, because
He was baked in every one.

(MOM walks onto the stage, and extinguishes the candle within ARISTOTLE. Fade to black)

THE END