

Sabbath Night in the Church of the Piranha

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CHARACTERS

UNA PENROSE, 35. Chris's mother. Marilyn's daughter

MARILYN, 55. Una's mother.

CHRIS PENROSE, 15. Una's son.

PATTY, 15. Chris's girlfriend.

TIME

First week of June. Saturday afternoon through early hours of Sunday morning.

PLACE

Five rooms on three floors in Una's house. The basement, where Patty sleeps on the couch. The living-room and dining-room, on the first floor, cluttered with stuff she has emptied out of the garage, which she is converting to a workroom/study. Chris's upstairs bedroom, with a walk-in closet. Una's upstairs bedroom. The kitchen is offstage, just beyond the dining room.

I imagine lighting and creative stage design being used to suggest these rooms, rather than a realistic set.

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(UNA has turned the dining room table into a desk, with a laptop computer, desk lamp, and various notebooks and papers neatly organized.)

UNA

(at her desk, laptop open, holding phone to her chest, looking around at the disorder of the house)

Great.

CHRIS

(on his way out of kitchen, shoeless and shirtless, pants hanging so low his underwear is exposed. He's holding a container of juice)

Who was that?

UNA

(closes laptop at CHRIS's entrance)

Your grandmother.

CHRIS

(to himself)

The beast. (to UNA) What now?

UNA

She's lost.

CHRIS

Where? At the loop? Here?

UNA

She can not figure out that loop. She's been here a dozen—

CHRIS

She'll just wind up storming out of here again.

UNA

That's not necessarily—

CHRIS

Penrose, you told her she couldn't just pop in like this. Now she's going to demand to see my room again; I'm going to say no again; she's going to look at me with disgust again, like how could I possibly have the audacity not to allow her to inspect my room like some Marine sergeant; then she's going to look at you with contempt for not being tougher with me and go off on the lock on my door like where do I get the nerve and then I'm going to tell her off again—

UNA

Perhaps— Perhaps some of that can be avoided, Chris? Do you think?

CHRIS

Master.

UNA

I'm not calling you *Master*. Forget it. *M* is the best I can manage.

CHRIS

I can live with *M*.

UNA

Fine, *M*. While we're on the subject of names, perhaps you could manage to call me Mom once in a while. You used to call me Mom. Now I'm Penrose.

CHRIS

When was the last time I called you Mom?

UNA

You always used to.

CHRIS

Since I moved in?

UNA

That's the point. Since you moved in I'm Penrose. Okay, so you weren't calling me anything last couple of years with your father.

CHRIS

I didn't talk to you for more than a year.

UNA

Okay . . . But before that you called me Mom. Okay, how about this? M, I'd appreciate it if you would call me Mom, rather than Penrose.

CHRIS

I'm not calling you Mom. Forget it. Best I can do is . . . Penrose.

UNA

Forever? That's it? I'm Penrose forever?

CHRIS

Maybe if you'd refer to me as I've requested, I'd be more inclined—

UNA

You want me to call you *Master!* That's not fair.

CHRIS

Why is it not fair? It's not *master* like *I'm your master*. It's a title, like *Professor* or *Doctor*. It would show that you take me seriously. Besides, calling you Mom puts me in exactly the kind of subordinate role—

UNA

Don't start.

CHRIS

That you're afraid calling me Master will put you in.

UNA

Don't start with the lectures.

CHRIS

I'm just— Way it is, that's all.

UNA

You *are* in a subordinate role. That's the way it is. I get the authority, you get room and board. I'm your mother.

CHRIS

What is she doing here anyway?

UNA

Another surprise.

CHRIS

I thought she wasn't coming back. I thought Patty was the last straw.

UNA

We both knew—

CHRIS
But you told me you told her no more surprise visits, that was it, amen.

UNA
I told her.

CHRIS
So?

UNA
So. Here she is.

CHRIS
And it just happens to be the Sabbath?

UNA
Please. You think I had something to do with it? Because of tonight?

CHRIS
I put in my request for the house weeks in advance. I told you.

UNA
Oh, stop. Just quit it. I didn't know she was coming. I didn't invite her. Look at this place.

CHRIS
Tell her she can't spend the night.

UNA
I can't.

CHRIS
Why not? This is your house. You told her already.

UNA
Don't. I'm supposed to tell my mother to turn around and drive back, which she couldn't do anyway? She'd have to stay in a motel, which she can't afford.

CHRIS
(angry, starts for stairs)
So I'm supposed to just call everything off.

UNA
Wait a second, Chris, M. Hold on. Don't you think maybe we can work something out?

CHRIS
What, Penrose? What are we going to work out? Patty's got to be here.

UNA
Oh—

CHRIS
She's Master of Earth and Water.

UNA
When's she coming?

CHRIS
She's coming tonight.

UNA
I thought she was Mistress of Earth and Water.

CHRIS
I decided that was sexist. We're both Masters now.

UNA
Okay. You know what? We can figure something out. This is our house. She'll just have to—

CHRIS
What would that be, Penrose, that we can figure out?

UNA
I don't have a clue. But if you'd try—

CHRIS
The woman— Everything about me drives her crazy. She can't even see my earring—

UNA
Well, why not, just for—

CHRIS
Don't even think it.

UNA
Why do you refuse to make accommodations?

CHRIS
Accommodations? Like you do? You mean *equivocations*, you mean *weasel*. How about this: how about *Lies*? How about *lying*?

UNA
Will you just quit it, Chris, M. Your father sent you here—

CHRIS
He sent me to get me out of L.A., like L.A. was my problem.

UNA
Actually, the exact problem was selling F in— What was the name of that school? You switched schools so many times since 6th—

CHRIS

E.

UNA

You went to a school called E? I don't recall—

CHRIS

E was the name of the drug. Not F.

UNA

The drug you were selling. Forgive me. I was close. What was the name of that school though?

CHRIS

I forget. What was it? I remember Vivian's father was on the school board.

UNA

Vivian being the girl you—

CHRIS

We're digressing, Penrose, no? I think your asshole mother—

UNA

Chris! You could try—

CHRIS

Penrose. The woman's— Look. What are you suggesting?

UNA

I'm suggesting we figure something out.

CHRIS

What? What? What?

UNA

If you'd make a few compromises—

CHRIS

No.

UNA

Maybe you could put on a shirt.

CHRIS

No.

UNA

Something about you going around bare-chested just drives her—

CHRIS

No.

UNA
 Maybe you could call me Mom.

(CHRIS makes gesture or sound indicating
 disdain at the suggestion)

UNA (Cont'd)
 Just while she's here.

CHRIS
 Why would I call you Mom?

UNA
 Because I'm your mother?

CHRIS
 No.

UNA
 All right. Maybe you could be careful this time not to curse.

CHRIS
 I said that once. I can't believe the way she went through the ceiling.

UNA
 Older women are— I don't get it either. It's only a word. I used to
 practice saying *flock*, so in case it slipped—

CHRIS
 Flock?

UNA
 Flock.

CHRIS
 So if you said, like, *Get the flock out of here*, she wouldn't— But if you
 said—

UNA
 Yes. I don't know.

CHRIS
 Penrose. Look.
 (starts up the stairs)
 We'll meet someplace else. I'll work it out.

UNA
 Chris, I don't mean for you—

CHRIS
 Soon as I turn 16— I'm out of school. I'm getting a job. I'm gone from
 here.

(Exits up stairs.

Lights fade on UNA and come up on CHRIS's bedroom, where he unlocks the door and slips in while UNA wanders toward her desk.

His room is wildly decorated.)

CHRIS (Cont'd)

(to himself): Stupid jerk. Idiot. Dope. Clown.

PATTY

(enters from walk-in closet with a blunt in her mouth. Smoke billows into room at opening of door. She's not wearing much)

Yo Chrissy—

CHRIS

PATTY, you got to keep that in the closet. The smoke.

PATTY

Oh.

(She goes back in closet and returns without the blunt. CHRIS places a rolled-up towel at foot of door and a spritzes some air-freshener into the room.)

PATTY (Cont'd)

Sorry. In my house, the only problem's my mom winds up smoking all my stuff. Where's the juice?

CHRIS

I forgot. We don't have the house tonight.

PATTY

Oh . . . You said.

CHRIS

The Witch is coming.

PATTY

The Beast? She called my mother a crack-head whore.

CHRIS

Penrose— She agreed—

PATTY

Your grandmother, she's like, evil or something.

CHRIS
My grandfather died in Vietnam. She never got over it.

PATTY
Viet What?

CHRIS
Viet Nam. It was a war in, like, Asia. My mother never even met him.
He was over there when she was born.

PATTY
I like your mother. (Playing with the sound of the name.) UNA. UNA.
UNA. What kind of name is that?

CHRIS
Irish.

PATTY
You're Irish?

CHRIS
I'm not anything. How can you say you like Penrose? You've only met
her once.

PATTY
That doesn't matter. She's famous. I'm in awe.

CHRIS
Of the Flush-it girl?

PATTY
Plus she's rich. You're lucky.

CHRIS
Don't start annoying me, Patty.

PATTY
And she's smart.

CHRIS
She is not smart.

PATTY
She goes to college.

CHRIS
She's taking Engineering, and Performance Studies.

PATTY
So?

CHRIS

So. Please. She'll build bridges while she's juggling on a unicycle.

PATTY

It's her life.

CHRIS

It's stupid.

PATTY

She's taking courses she wants. I don't get your problem.

CHRIS

Don't be dumb, will you?

PATTY

Why?

CHRIS

You're in awe of her. She's so smart. She let's her mother get away with anything! What kind of an adult let's that go on?

PATTY

Your mother's not stupid.

CHRIS

You don't think so? You know why she was letting us have the house tonight? Because I told her you and I started our own religion, and tonight was our first Sabbath.

PATTY

Sabbath? Isn't that Jewish? Me and you?

CHRIS

It's our own religion. We started it. We already have several followers, adherents, disciples, whatever.

PATTY

Me and you?

CHRIS

Us.

PATTY

What did I have to do with it?

CHRIS

You started it with me. I'm Master of Fire and Air. You're Master of Earth and Water.

PATTY

Wouldn't I be Mistress of Earth and Water?

CHRIS

No.

PATTY

And she believed this? You told her we started— Does it have a name?

CHRIS

The Church of the Piranha.

PATTY

Get out of here! I know I'm wasted—

CHRIS

I'm for real.

PATTY

We started a church called the Church of the Piranha.

CHRIS

I came up with it watching a documentary about the Amazon. There was one thing where a cow or something gets eaten by piranha, this super-dramatic voice-over going *They come at you in swarms! They eat you alive!* Then, later, I have a dream where my mother I'm watching this water boiling with piranha and she comes she rises up out of the river like a bone person, a talking skeleton. I'm like, I'm looking at her and I notice all her bones are like taped together or something. There's paper-clips, strings, bits of ribbon, clumps of glue, every bone's like patched together to the next bone, and I'm going: Penrose? Does that hurt? Are you all right? She just keeps walking toward me. She's talking about something; I don't know what she's saying; meanwhile, a rib is falling off here, a knuckle there. Then I look down, and I'm the same way. Then I look around, and everybody I know's the same way. We're all bones and scotch tape.

PATTY

Me too? Was I in this dream?

CHRIS

Everybody I ever knew—

PATTY

They come at you in swarms! They eat you alive!

CHRIS

We were all taped-together skeleton people, walking around, tipping our hats to each other, like a club— Except my grandmother, she was doing a backstroke down the middle of the river.

PATTY

She's the only one's not a skeleton—

CHRIS

No, no, there's lots of flesh people, it's just everybody *I* know's a skeleton person. Look. Just. I was talking to Penrose, just messing with her head, and then all this stuff's coming to me; I'm like explaining how the piranha is the ironic reversal of the Christian Icthus—

PATTY

The Christian what?

CHRIS

Icthus: the Christian fish symbol thing you see swimming all over everybody's bumper.

PATTY

And the piranha's what?

CHRIS

I'm making this all up, Patty. And Penrose's looking at me like *Is he serious?*

PATTY

The piranha's like what though?

CHRIS

Like the opposite.

PATTY

I don't get any of this.

CHRIS

You're wasted; and, besides that, it's bullshit. And then you tend to actually listen to people, Patty, which is a serious problem for you.

PATTY

Why?

CHRIS

You tend to overvalue people. You put too much faith in them.

PATTY

All this, because I don't get the piranha thing?

CHRIS

There's nothing to get. It's bullshit.

PATTY

And your mother really is buying this piranha—

CHRIS

Patty, I've *almost* got her calling me Master.

PATTY

That's not cool. You can't—

CHRIS

Shsss.

(hears someone coming up the stairs. Lights fade on the room, come up on the hall as UNA calls his name and CHRIS slides out into the hall, closing the door behind him)

CHRIS (Cont'd)

You want something, Penrose?

UNA

Okay. I have an idea. Change your get-together for another night, and I'll arrange to be out of the house the whole evening. I'll even buy you a couple of deli trays.

CHRIS

Deli trays . . . Get-together . . .

UNA

Okay, whatever. You know what I mean.

CHRIS

This is a Sabbath ceremony, not a get-together. We're not going to snack off deli trays, we're going to drink the blood of life.

UNA

You're going to what?

CHRIS

Figuratively, just like you Christians.

UNA

I'm not a Christian.

(CHRIS makes gesture or sound indicating contempt)

UNA (Cont'd)

What does that mean?

CHRIS

Penrose, I can't cancel tonight's gathering. It's the Sabbath.

UNA

Why does tonight have to be the Sabbath? It's your own religion. You invented it—

CHRIS

Founded it. You invent things.

UNA

Fine. Founded. It's still your religion. Why can't you make the Sabbath next Wednesday night, when I have a shoot in Dallas?

CHRIS

Because I declared tonight.

UNA

Can't you undeclare it?

CHRIS

No. It's declared. It's done.

UNA

So that's it. There's no compromise possible.

CHRIS

I didn't say that.

UNA

Give me a hint. What kind of compromise were you considering?

CHRIS

We'll do it with you here. Just let us have the basement, undisturbed, the upstairs doors closed, you don't come near us.

UNA

And what was I going to tell my mother about why a dozen kids are chanting by candle light in the basement?

CHRIS

The truth. You ought to try that, Penrose. You are an adult.

UNA

Again? The lectures? I'm a grown woman. There's nothing I have to hide from my mother. However, she's not in the best of health, and I'd rather not watch her choke and die when I tell her about the Church of the Piranha. That's all. I don't think that makes me a coward. I think that makes me a grown up.

CHRIS

Think what you will.

UNA

Okay. All right. How about I get her out of the house by six for dinner and a movie, and keep her out till ten or so? Can you have your ceremony done with and everybody out of here by then?

CHRIS

Eleven.

UNA
Fine. Eleven.

CHRIS
And Patty's spending the night.

UNA
Chris.

CHRIS
M.

UNA
M. You know what— Okay. But she sleeps on the downstairs sofa.

CHRIS
If you insist.

UNA
I insist. And look, you live here, so how you handle it is up to you—I'm not going to tell you you can't have your girlfriend at the house— but you know what's going to happen once she sees Patty.

CHRIS
What am I supposed to do?

UNA
That's up to you. You handle it. I'll deal with my mother, whatever. All I'm saying is, if there's some way she could not know Patty spent the night— She's from a different generation. She won't get it.

CHRIS
I have to hide Patty?

UNA
I didn't say that. Do whatever you want. This is our house. I'm just saying—

CHRIS
This is your house. I'm here by court order.

UNA
Chris, M. I've done everything—

CHRIS
I'm not hiding Patty. The hell with her.

UNA
Okay, quit. Fine. Like I said— When's Patty getting here?

CHRIS
 (glancing through walls at PATTY in his room)
 Any time now.

UNA
 However you want to handle it— Once last thing. Since I'm doing most
 of the compromising here, how about if you let us call you Chris, just
 while she's here.

CHRIS
 No.

UNA
 Just while my mother's here.

CHRIS
 No. No way. Forget it.

UNA
 I can not call you Master, let alone ask my mother to call you Master.
 She is not capable—

(They both hear MARILYN at the front door)

CHRIS
 Then just avoid calling me anything, the way you mostly do anyway.

UNA
 All right, how about this? Will you just agree not to ask her to call you
 Master when she calls you Chris?

CHRIS
 I guess I can live with that.
 (bell rings)
 The moment is upon us.
 (Bell rings. CHRIS backs into his room)
 You'd better get the door before she busts in.

UNA
 Chris. If you'd come down to say hello, I'd appreciate it.

CHRIS
 M.

(CHRIS exits to his room. UNA starts for front
 door, meets MARILYN as she enters)

MARILYN
 That loop, my God! Didn't you hear me? Honey, how are you?

UNA
 Mom. Come on in. You must be—

MARILYN

(disorder just registering)

What? Una! Honey! What is going on? What is this?

UNA

It's the garage; put your suitcase down; how long are you staying?

MARILYN

The garage? I thought the weekend; if I'm welcome, of course. Where's Chris?

UNA

Taking a nap. I'll get coffee. Are you hungry?

MARILYN

Saturday afternoon and he's locked up in his room taking a nap?

UNA

I think I've got coffee cake—

MARILYN

Is he sick? Why isn't he out playing basketball or doing something healthy, a day like this? I saw a group of athletic young men on the way here playing basketball—

UNA

You drove by the park?

MARILYN

I was impressed that they were all wearing T-shirts, every single one of them. None of this public semi-nudity you see. Why have you emptied the garage into the house?

UNA

The park is way over— The garage: it's a lot of Chris's stuff that Rick had shipped—

MARILYN

Have you talked to Rick? Does he have a girlfriend yet?

UNA

Not that I know of.

MARILYN

More than two years you're divorced, that man still has not had a serious relationship.

UNA

Now how would you know that, Mom?

MARILYN

Word would get back to us. You broke that man's heart. I don't know how you live with yourself.

UNA

You're here two minutes.

MARILYN

Should I leave? I'm still holding my suitcase.

UNA

I see. Put it down.

MARILYN

Where should I put it?

UNA

On the floor.

MARILYN

Right here?

UNA

For now.

MARILYN

Why don't I put it where I'm spending the night, that makes so much more sense instead of hauling it around all over the house. Use your head, Una.

UNA

You'll take my bedroom, as usual. You prefer that mattress. Carry your suitcase up there, if you like.

MARILYN

Where's Chris? That's the kind of thing a young man could do for his grandmother, don't you think? Carry her suitcase up to her room?

UNA

He's taking a nap.

MARILYN

On a Saturday afternoon. All right. I'll put it here for now. How come Rick hasn't come to see Chris? You've been back a full year, and he hasn't come to see you or Chris. I don't understand your whole generation. Your values—

UNA

Chris has only been here six months, not even.

MARILYN

But you've been here a year already. Rick flies all over the place anyway, wasn't that one of your problems? I don't understand why he wouldn't try to win you back.

UNA

Mom, will you quit it, please? Don't get going a hundred miles an hour like you do, and maybe we can have a nice conversation.

MARILYN

What's wrong with this conversation? This is not nice?

UNA

Not for me. I don't want to talk about Rick. We're not getting back together, ever. I have no desire.

MARILYN

Oh, Una. How could you? The man made you rich. He made you famous. He adored you to death. And you just walked out on him. Thirteen years of marriage! Not to mention walking out on your own son. It's no wonder he's turned out like this. You make me, just—

UNA

You want that coffee cake, Mom?

MARILYN

I'll have a little piece. He made you rich and famous, Honey.

UNA

I'm not rich.

(MARILYN makes gesture or sound indicating disbelief)

UNA (Cont'd)

And if you call being the Flush-it girl famous—

MARILYN

Of course it's famous. All my girlfriends call me every time they see you. As soon as I see a spot, I take the phone off the hook, so I don't have to hear—

UNA

What do they say? *Marilyn!* I just saw your daughter Una swimming in a toilet bowl! *She is so cute!*

MARILYN

Sometimes. It's not like that's your only commercial.

UNA

It's the one pays the bills.

MARILYN

Who are you kidding? Pays the bills! You never have to work another day in your life! Are you afraid I'm after your money? I have never taken a cent from you and I never will!

UNA

I'm not—

MARILYN

Well don't go making up stories about being destitute. If anyone's near destitute, it's not you.

UNA

I didn't say— I'm shooting a new spot next week in Dallas. It could be good income.

MARILYN

Dallas? You're flying to Dallas? Who's taking care of Chris? He can stay with me, you know. I wouldn't mind.

UNA

He's old enough to take care of himself.

MARILYN

He is not old enough to take care of himself. He's barely fifteen. He's still a child.

UNA

Mom, don't, quit it, will you?

MARILYN

Don't you realize that if something happened you could be charged with child neglect? You see it in the papers all the time. Something happens, where's the parents? They've left the child alone, that's it. Child neglect. They lose their children.

UNA

I doubt that would be—

MARILYN

You are out of your mind if you leave that boy alone in this house without supervision. I *hope* you've done something about that girl.

UNA

It's a one day shoot.

MARILYN

What's the product?

UNA

Toilet paper.

MARILYN

What, are you type-cast now?

UNA

It's the same people. They like me.

MARILYN

Of course they like you, but you don't want to be type cast; you don't want to do bathroom commercials exclusively.

UNA

I don't want to do commercials at all. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm taking classes.

MARILYN

Engineering. You want to be an *inventor*. Every other girl in the world wants to be an actress—

UNA

Me too. I want to be an actress.

MARILYN

You are an actress. I don't understand you. All right, you're not doing Shakespeare—

UNA

I'm swimming in a toilet bowl.

MARILYN

You keep saying that.

UNA

For a reason. I'd like you to understand. You've made me out this success story, but not in my eyes, not the way I see it. I see swimming in the toilet bowl as just perfect—

MARILYN

That's disgusting, to say that.

UNA

Don't get me going. Not Shakespeare. I'm in a john in a bikini. I'm smiling, (acts) *Oh no! Don't flush that toilet! Not without Flush It, the sanitary deodorizer!* Not Shakespeare? Do you know how many people have come up to me over the years, how many complete strangers, have repeated those lines for me, acting them out? It's a kind of hell, a surreal, drugged-out, Rod Serling—

MARILYN

You've explained this to me numerous times, Una.

UNA

Why don't you get it?

MARILYN

And you're going to be an engineer now? Una, please. An engineer.

UNA

What— Why— What is it that you don't think—

MARILYN

You're going to be an inventor. I should have never let you read all those Hardy Boys books. I could not understand why you preferred them to Nancy Drew.

UNA

What?

MARILYN

The acting class makes some sense, not that you need it. You're a wonderful actress. Who's this teaching you to act? If he had made the money you made, he wouldn't be teaching would he? Use your head, Una. Why don't you make Chris clean up this mess for you. A little responsibility will straighten him out fast.

UNA

I always— I can remember being little I used to dream up stuff to make housework easier. A dishwasher you could just drop dishes into without having to scrap off the food, and then arrange and place each little dish and fork. Think of the time it would save: you drop 'em in; it disposes of the food, cleans and arranges the dishes. That's possible. I never meant inventing something to end world hunger, Mom, just little things, gadgets. I've just always enjoyed tinkering like that. That's something I could do. I don't know why you never encouraged me.

MARILYN

Because between the two of us, I'm the one with an ounce of sense.

UNA

Thank you, Mom.

MARILYN

You never cease—

UNA

The mess has to stay put till I have the storage shed emptied, which is where it's all going, because I'm turning the garage into a workroom, which I'm going to use for projects and ideas.

MARILYN

Projects and what?

UNA

Which I hope will lead to inventions and patents.

MARILYN

You're not telling people—

UNA

Mom. We need to talk about the weekend.

MARILYN

What?

UNA

Chris has become involved with a group of people—

MARILYN

What group of people? That girl's not involved I hope. What I found out about her father—

UNA

Mom. Let me explain.

MARILYN

I asked around after, and I'm going to tell you what I found out.

UNA

I promised Chris he could have the house tonight.

MARILYN

What do you mean, have the house?

UNA

For a ceremony.

MARILYN

What ceremony?

UNA

For this group him and— Anyway, I told him—

MARILYN

What group? What ceremony? Boy Scouts? Four H?

UNA

Not quite.

MARILYN

I didn't think so, that boy.

UNA

It's a kind of religious group—

MARILYN

No. Really?

UNA

Don't get excited, Mom.

MARILYN

I'm not excited. I just think a religious group is exactly the kind of thing a boy like that needs.

UNA

It's not a traditional religious group. It's something he sort of—

MARILYN

It's a cult! Oh please— And you're letting him—

UNA

It's not a cult.

MARILYN

Well, what is it then? Not Satanism? Oh my—

UNA

Chris is not a Satanist.

MARILYN

Thank goodness.

UNA

It's a religion he's founded himself, with— With help from several, in a group that's kind of formed around him.

MARILYN

That's a cult. Your son's a cult leader.

UNA

In a way, but it's not a bad thing if you'd just listen. The idea is very traditional, really. He's explained it to me in depth, and actually it was one of the first really times he opened up a little since he came, so it's a good thing. The idea underlying everything which might seem a little radical on the surface is actually very traditional. It's *carpe diem*; seize the day; appreciate the splendor of the moment. That's really as I understand it the heart of it.

MARILYN

That's religion? What do they worship?

UNA

The piranha. Okay, they don't *worship* the piranha, but it's called The Church of the Piranha, which represents the violence, the piranha, because— And rather than be repulsed and frightened and turn away from it, they worship it. Not violence; they don't worship violence; they embrace the moment, which is more precious because violence— Violence helps— defines— The moment is more precious because there is violence, which is sudden change, not violence, but something Chris

calls "the instant of sudden change"—which is always violent, and so they accept that, and they're thankful. So, I realize how it sounds, on the surface, but, if you think about it, it's not some terrible, frightening thing. It's really very healthy, and I think we're all best advised to encourage this kind of spiritual exploration. Mom?

MARILYN

Your father died, fighting for his country, so that— For a grandson who does something like this. His only grandchild.

UNA

What does my father dying in Vietnam have to do with Chris? This is spiritual exploration.

MARILYN

Spiritual. Since that boy arrived here, he has been walking all over you. All over you. Spiritual. You let him traipse around the house half naked. He has a lock on his door, in your house, a lock on his door so you don't even know! You haven't even been in that room, you have no idea what he's done in there, all hoarded up. Don't tell me he's sleeping, taking a nap. He runs this place. He runs you. He'll come down if he feels like it, *when* he feels like it. Deny it, Una. Tell me you have one ounce of control over that boy.

UNA

And this has what to do with dying in Vietnam?

MARILYN

That boy is his grandson, that's what it has to do. It breaks my heart to watch him floundering without an adult in sight has any idea how to raise a child.

UNA

Mom. Quit.

MARILYN

Mom, quit. I can't even figure out where to start. That girl. You haven't done anything about that girl, have you? And now— The church of the what? Are you out of your mind? Use your head, Una! He's mocking you. He's asking you for a boundary somewhere—*let's see how outrageous I can possibly be before she puts her foot down!* Someplace somewhere somebody's got to tell him right from wrong; somebody's got to act like a parent. Una. I can not sit by quietly and just watch this.

UNA

(finds a bottle of pills, shakes one out)

Because he's my father's grandchild, not because he's your grandchild.

MARILYN

What's that? Are you taking Valium again? I thought you were taking Prozac?

UNA

Are you sure this is about raising Chris right, Mom? Or are you horrified by anyone with some spirit left in them?

MARILYN

You're not supposed to be taking Valium if you're taking Prozac.

UNA

Maybe I should make him get naked in the bathtub and take a switch to him when he does something I don't like.

MARILYN

Are you going to harp on that the rest of your life? I've apologized since you first— I said I'm sorry, I admitted it was too extreme, a mistake, but that's how my father raised me and I was only trying—

UNA

We've been through all this. Just—

MARILYN

All the good things I did raising you, you forget. That you remember.

UNA

Listen. Mom.

MARILYN

Is that Valium?

UNA

It's a vitamin. It's nothing.

(CHRIS opens his door and slides out into hall
on the way downstairs)

UNA (Cont'd)

He's my child. I'm doing my best. Please don't interfere.

(CHRIS enters dining room)

CHRIS

Hello, Marilyn. How are you?

MARILYN

Christopher, I would very much appreciate it if you would wear a shirt when I'm in the house.

UNA

And she's asked you to call her Grandmother.

(CHRIS turns away from both women, looks out
window.)

MARILYN

Is it too much to ask of you, to wear a shirt?

CHRIS

No. I'll go put one on. Look at that: birds flocking right there.
(turns, starts to leave)

MARILYN

One second.
(notices earring. To UNA)
And he's still wearing that thing, like a girl.

CHRIS

I'll go put on a shirt for you, but I'm not taking off the earring. Want me just to go back up to my room and stay there?

MARILYN

(tries to yank up his pants)
I want you to behave with some semblance of decency, at least when I'm here.

CHRIS

(starts up stairs)
(to UNA) Penrose . . . I'm—

MARILYN

(to UNA) I thought you were going to insist he not call you that? (to CHRIS) Now just wait one second.

CHRIS

(on stairs)
I've really . . .

MARILYN

Una?

UNA

(gestures for him to stay)
Pal. Just—

CHRIS

Pal? Okay, Buddy. What, Grandmother?

MARILYN

Your mother says you're involved in a religious organization, and that you'd like us to vacate the house for you, so that you can have a . . . I think she used the word *ceremony*.

CHRIS

The Church of the Piranha.

MARILYN

The Church of the Piranha.

CHRIS

We worship the beauty and wonder of the moment, given its splendor by the imminence of sudden change, manifested most obviously by violent death, symbolically represented by the voracious piranha.

MARILYN

Oh you do, do you? You little con artist.

CHRIS

Penrose?

UNA

Mom—

MARILYN

And what exactly is involved in this ceremony that you can't have any adult supervision?

CHRIS

What does any of this have to do with you, Marilyn? (to UNA) She's like a one-woman police force.

MARILYN

(to UNA) Can't you see this disrespect? He's treating you like a fool.

CHRIS

(to MARILYN): You know what one of the tenets of our church is? In the Church of the Piranha, we're not going to allow mothers to raise sons.

UNA

Really?

CHRIS

(to MARILYN): You should like that.

MARILYN

Why would I like that?

UNA

You're going to take boys away from their mothers?

CHRIS

If a couple splits up, mothers raise daughters; fathers raise the sons.

UNA

And when did you come up with this tenet, Chris?

CHRIS

Master.

UNA

Pal. What's your point?

CHRIS

Mothers should raise daughters; fathers should raise sons. Girls will take their mother's last names, and boys will take their father's last names, and that way we'll have clear maternal and paternal lines.

MARILYN

Why do you think I'll like this?

CHRIS

Because then I'd be back in L.A. with my father; not here screwing things up for you.

UNA

You're not—

MARILYN

It's not your presence, it's your behavior.

CHRIS

Plus, in the Church of the Piranha, everybody gets to choose their own title. You could choose to be called Grandmother, and we'd all call you Grandmother—but of course you'd have to have enough respect to call us by our chosen titles.

MARILYN

Oh, and do you have a title?

UNA

Where would all your believers congregate, in this church?

CHRIS

On an island someplace. Someplace where the weather's mild, and you can grow your own food, and you don't have to deal with too many things.

MARILYN

Do you think that's particularly realistic, Christopher?

CHRIS

Have you noticed that you and Penrose often talk in questions?

UNA

Do we really do that? (to MARILYN) Have you noticed that?

MARILYN

Are you going to let him just change the subject?

CHRIS

I'm not changing the subject.

MARILYN

I'm not going anywhere this evening, young man. I don't think either of you realize the possible consequences.

CHRIS

What consequences? (to UNA) Are you going to allow her to just dictate—

MARILYN

Corrupting the morals of minors, contributing to the delinquency of minors, child neglect. Not to mention what could happen if you use alcohol or drugs and somebody goes out and gets into an accident and kills someone or maims them horribly. Do you realize what could happen to your mother? She could wind up in jail.

CHRIS

This is— This is just—

UNA

Will you two please stop. You're like fire and water— Oil and fire— Whatever.

CHRIS

(to MARILYN): Keep the house. Like I told Penrose, we'll meet elsewhere.

(exits)

MARILYN

(pursuing UNA as they both exit to kitchen)

Una, I'm your mother and his Grandmother, and I have certain responsibilities—

CHRIS

(entering bedroom)

Stupid. Dumb.

(sees PATTY by the window dancing to music only she hears, through headphones. Perhaps she's playing along, making guitar sounds. Watches her a moment, then lies down on bed.)

PATTY

(surprised by CHRIS)

Oh. Where'd you come from?

CHRIS

I just beamed down.

PATTY

(joins him on bed)

Oooh. You don't look happy.

CHRIS

You're sweaty.

PATTY

What's the problem, Master of Fire and Air?

CHRIS

She's not buying the church.

PATTY

Who?

CHRIS

The beast. She's camping out.

PATTY

Oh . . . Tonight's off again? It doesn't matter.

CHRIS

(Pulling away from her, getting off bed)

It does matter! She said I could have the house. She told me I had the house. She told me! She said it!

PATTY

So? Look at you. You're all, like, out of control.

CHRIS

I'm not out of control.

PATTY

You're all worked up, you're like foaming at the mouth.

CHRIS

I'm not foaming at the mouth. Please.

PATTY

Here. Let me see. I think you are foaming. Look. You're definitely foaming. There's some foam right there.

CHRIS

Don't start with me, Patty.

PATTY

Chris. You can't let them get to you.

CHRIS

I'm not letting them get to me. Please.

PATTY

What are you all raving *She told me, She said* then? What are you all so pissed off if they're not getting to you?

CHRIS

Patty, listen, please. I'm not letting them, but I go down there and it's put on a shirt, take off the earring, pull up your pants, where's your decency; and Penrose is like— Does she say a word? Does she tell her mother *He's my kid, Stay out of it?* I mean, where is she? She's like mute. The Beast calls me a con artist, does she say anything? Has she got a word to say?

PATTY

I'm glad you're not worked up. I'm glad they're not getting to you.

CHRIS

Give me a break, Patty. I'm not worked up.

PATTY

Why'd she call you a con artist?

CHRIS

Because of the Church of the Piranha thing.

PATTY

Let me, just— I want to be sure— You told your grandmother about The Church of the Piranha, and she called you a con artist, and you're like—

CHRIS

Where's she get off? What's her problem?

PATTY

It's a mystery.

CHRIS

She's all over Penrose. She's all over me. She's like, everybody's supposed to be like she thinks they're supposed to be because my grandfather, because I'm his only grandson, like everything is all how I turn out.

PATTY

What's your grandfather got to do with anything?

CHRIS

You don't want to know.

PATTY

She told you this?

CHRIS

Only like every time I see her.

PATTY

And what's—

CHRIS

To her, it's all he died and I have to somehow be what he died for.

PATTY

You have *be* what he died for?

CHRIS

In her mind. Like, he died so the world could be like I guess this particular way and whatever that way is, I'm not it.

PATTY

Is this making any sense?

CHRIS

I don't know. I guess I can— He must have had an idea of what was worthwhile or something. To her, it's, I'm supposed to be . . .

PATTY

You're supposed to be what your grandfather died for?

CHRIS

Something like that.

PATTY

Shit.

CHRIS

You can see how she might have a problem.

PATTY

She might have a problem. Like you're supposed to know what your grandfather thought you would be, like you could be that way like he wanted you because that's what she thinks you're supposed to.

CHRIS

Something like that. I think.

PATTY

That's shit. That's just a way to push you around.

CHRIS

Not really, Patty.

PATTY

What do you mean, not really? There's some war some place in history and the world's not changing anymore? You're supposed to be like all the same things he was? I mean, not even asking what he was about, which I wouldn't exactly trust her on. I bet you he'd like you, Chris. He

died when he was twenty or like that? I bet you he'd be cool with me and you, he'd be all: go for it, Boy! She's hot!

CHRIS

You think?

PATTY

We'd probably like him. He'd be getting high with us. He'd be all *Listen up: forget that war shit, give me some more smoke!*

CHRIS

You're funny, Patty.

PATTY

You can't let them see you losing it, Chrissy. You can't let them.

CHRIS

I don't.

PATTY

I'm once I remember: my mother, I didn't do something or some shit, and she's all high-and-mighty *apologize right this instant*, and I'm, I just look at her, right? So she slaps me, I mean, she knocks me across the room. I don't think she meant to hit me that hard, I'm, like, little, and I go flying across the room and I hit my cheek on the refrigerator and then the whole side of my face, its instant swollen, my eye is almost completely closed: it's bang, hit the refrigerator, I'm squintin' out of my eye trying to see through this big swollen ugly lump, and my mother, I can see, she looks, like, totally shocked, but she's just standing there, and inside I'm you know screaming or some shit; but, I'm just, I never let her see it. I turn around, take some ice out of the fridge, put it on my eye, walk away. I go back up to my room, like, screw you, you're not getting to me. I mean, that's the way it is. That's the way you have to be.

CHRIS

You're tough.

PATTY

Tough as they come, Dude. You ever seen me sweat?

(settles on bed)

I'm Mistress of Fire and Air, right?

CHRIS

Whatever.

PATTY

Come here, Master.

CHRIS

What?

PATTY

Come here.

(CHRIS joins her on the bed)

PATTY (Cont'd)

I'm a rap star.

(She makes musical, rap-like sounds by putting her lips on his belly or chest and blowing.)

CHRIS

Cut that out.

(He tickles her and their play quickly evolves into something sexual going on wildly under the sheets)

(Lights come up on MARILYN and UNA on the way to UNA's bedroom.)

MARILYN

I am not leaving this house to those children. Who knows without adult supervision the kinds of things they could be doing!

UNA

Mom. We're going out. I'm an adult, this is my home. You don't get to make those calls.

MARILYN

This is a legal matter! This is a legal issue! I can not just allow you— (notices lock on CHRIS's door) Do you hear something? Is that music? Is he listening to music?

UNA

I going to tell my teenage son he can't listen to music?

MARILYN

How you could allow him to put a deadbolt—

UNA

Don't start in on that again. It's fine with me for him to have his own space. Here—

(nudges MARILYN into her bedroom. Notices mess of wires and gadgets spread around floor and over bed. Gathers them up and puts them in a cardboard box that's on the floor.)

UNA (Cont'd)

I forgot. Slight problem.

MARILYN

What is this? This whole house is just completely out of order. I don't know how you can stand it.

UNA

It's just— It'll take a second.

MARILYN

(Sits on bed, notices a wire running from an outlet to a place under the bed)

What's this?

UNA

Go ahead and unplug that, please. They're batteries.

MARILYN

Why would you have batteries under your bed?

UNA

They're recharging.

MARILYN

That's an answer?

UNA

I'm tinkering with something. A way of possibly controlling bedbugs.

MARILYN

(getting up)

Bedbugs! How could you possibly— You put bedbugs—

UNA

Quit. I don't have bedbugs. I'm just tinkering.

MARILYN

Just tinkering? With what?

UNA

An idea. It's a simple idea for using a couple of rechargeable batteries to produce a tiny electric current that either kills or startles bedbugs. Either way it should get rid of them.

MARILYN

But you don't have bedbugs.

UNA

Of course not. But, in developing countries, in poverty, in places where . . . They're a major problem, bedbugs. People actually die—

MARILYN

So you're going to infest your own bed?

UNA

I'm not infesting anything. I was just testing to see if I could use rechargeable batteries, which would be the most cost-effective—

MARILYN

But you're not putting bedbugs in your own bed, for God's sake!

UNA

No bedbugs, Mom. No bedbugs. Just rechargeable batteries set up with a wiring grid. No bedbugs. I'm just, only batteries.

MARILYN

This is what you want to give up acting for. To fry bedbugs.

UNA

Mom. Don't get upset, but let me ask you something. I know your father was the one used to make you cut a switch—

MARILYN

Back to this. How many times?

(CHRIS gets out of bed, on his way down to kitchen.)

UNA

Quit Mom, just listen a minute. Did he make you take off all your clothes before he switched you?

MARILYN

Your whole generation, you know that? We didn't have that kind of thing in my generation. He made me take my clothes off so that the switch wouldn't tear them up. Same reason I made you take yours off. That's all. It took your generation, Clinton and his cigars, to think anything else.

UNA

Well, how old were you?

(MARILYN doesn't answer.)

UNA (Cont'd)

How old were you before it stopped?

MARILYN

You're changing the subject. The subject is your boy. His father's raised him to be a pig, and I'm not going to watch you ruin him further.

UNA

We're going out tonight.

MARILYN

We are not.

UNA

We are. Besides, I haven't even had a chance to explain to you, I've got a date. I've had it planned for weeks. You'll like him. He's an architect.

(CHRIS, outside the door, overhears this. He stops to listen.)

MARILYN

An architect?

UNA

I've known him a couple of months now.

MARILYN

And not a word? Who is he? Is he a successful architect?

UNA

Very. He's from L.A., which is where I know him from, but he's thinking about moving here because he's got family in the area.

MARILYN

No! What's his name?

UNA

David. You can talk to him yourself. He'll fill you in on all the details. You'll like him. He's even a Republican.

MARILYN

The majority of successful people are. Would I recognize any of the buildings he designed.

UNA

You can ask him.

MARILYN

Una, we can not just leave that boy alone.

UNA

We are. I've got a date. I'd like you to meet him. And I promised Chris.

MARILYN

Your father. When I think of your father, and Christopher may be the only grandson he ever has.

UNA

I don't know anything about my father.

MARILYN

You know he was your father. You know he never even got to see his own daughter, or to live out his life, and that Chris is his grandson. You owe him something at least for that.

UNA

Yes I owe him something, Mom, but you always make it that I owe him to believe all the same things you do.

MARILYN

That's disgusting, to say that.

UNA

Mom, I am so tired of hearing; we are all so tired of hearing—

MARILYN

Una, was that a Valium you took?

UNA

It was a vitamin. I'm doing fine. I'm doing great.

MARILYN

All right. Maybe I'll take a little nap then, if we're going. But I don't know, really . . .

UNA

Good idea.

MARILYN

I don't know . . .

UNA

I'll wake you in a hour or so.

MARILYN

(UNA is almost out the door)

What made you ask me how old I was when my father used to switch me? Why all of a sudden . . . ?

UNA

You mentioned something once about a bra in the same breath with being switched. It surprised me. I've wanted to ask you about it.

MARILYN

It did go on past when I was developed. But that only made it all the more humiliating. Humiliating, Una. Nothing sick, the way you're suggesting. Your generation—

UNA

My generation— Mom— All I want— You never tell me anything concrete about the man. Not a word. I'm just asking—

MARILYN

Well, it's disgusting, asking that.

UNA

Okay, Mom. I was just . . . surprised.

MARILYN

Don't let me sleep too long.

(UNA exits bedroom, finds CHRIS barefoot and bare-chested, staring at her from in front of the closed door to his room)

UNA

(speaking softly)

It's taken care of. We'll be out of the house, like I said, as per agreement.

CHRIS

How can you let her just come in here—

UNA

Don't start. You have the house.

CHRIS

That's not— I overheard the David stuff.

UNA

(Moves away to talk louder.)

What were you, listening at the door?

CHRIS

I was going downstairs.

UNA

And you just overheard. So? Will you call me at the restaurant? Make *David's* sudden change in plans more believable?

CHRIS

No I won't, Penrose. You don't get it. You don't see it.

UNA

What?

CHRIS

Let me help. You're a liar.

UNA

Don't start, Chris. Just don't.

CHRIS

Why not? It's one of the things I've always hated about you. You just invented this David. I heard you lying to her up and down. You did it to

me all the time growing up. You'd tell me we we're going one place when we we're really going someplace else; you'd tell me something would take ten minutes and it'd wind up taking an hour; you'd tell me you could take care of something and then you'd never even try. Why do you do that? I mean, what's wrong with you? Why can't you just be honest? Why do you always have to be such a liar? Everything about you is a lie. I mean, I don't know. Do you know?

UNA

I know. Would you like to hear?

CHRIS

Flock, yes; I'd like to hear.

UNA

It's because— There's a chair. You might need to sit down for this. The world is not as simple as you see it.

CHRIS

The world's not simple and that's why you're a liar? I see the world simple?

UNA

Black and white, up and down, right and wrong, good and bad.

CHRIS

I don't think the world's simple. I never said— What I think is that you're a liar and you're full of shit, and you'll tell anybody anything as long as you get what you want in the end.

UNA

There are limits here, *M*. There are limits to what I'll put up with.

CHRIS

What are my limits, Penrose? Dad puts me on a goddamn airplane and I have to live here after he knew I refused to even talk to you now I have to live with you. Penrose. You put a whole country between us and he makes me come following after you like a sorry puppy.

UNA

I didn't put a country between us.

CHRIS

See what I mean? Yes you did. Of course you did. One week, while Dad and I were off camping—because of course you wouldn't have the guts to do it face to face—you packed up all your stuff, had it shipped out, and that was it: you were gone. You left me a note. On my pillow. Penrose.

UNA

I could have handled that a little better, huh?

CHRIS

You think?

UNA

Chris, M. I couldn't keep on being the Flush-it girl.

CHRIS

I read the letter.

UNA

It hasn't been easy here either. I want— I need—

CHRIS

I said I read the letter. You want, fine. I want you to have what you want. I'll be out of here soon as I can. What I'm saying is, I wish you'd quit lying. It drives me crazy. For the short time I have to be here with you, if you could just not lie *all the time*.

(starts back up stairs)

UNA

I don't lie all the time.

CHRIS

Did you tell her no more overnight surprise visits?

UNA

No. I didn't.

CHRIS

(near UNA's bedroom)

But you told me you did. That's called a lie, Penrose.

UNA

It's an equivocation. I believe my exact wording was—

CHRIS

(loud)

Don't bother! Please!

MARILYN

(investigating voices outside the room, finds CHRIS and UNA)

What's this? (to CHRIS) Don't you own any clothing? Is this a nudist colony?

UNA

He's not nude.

CHRIS

Want to see nude?

MARILYN

Don't you dare! (to UNA) How do you— (to CHRIS) If we leave the house tonight, can we trust you not to bring that girl here?

UNA

Mom—

CHRIS

What girl?

MARILYN

You know full well—

CHRIS

Patty? Why wouldn't I bring Patty?

MARILYN

Why wouldn't you? Because she's a little slut, that's why.

CHRIS

Where do you get the nerve.

UNA

Look. You two—

MARILYN

(to UNA) You told me you put your foot down about that creature.

CHRIS

She told you what? You told her what?

UNA

(to MARILYN) I did not tell you— I think what I actually said—

MARILYN

You most certainly did.

CHRIS

Patty is my girlfriend! No one is going to tell me anything!

(lights begin to slowly fade in the hall, and come up on PATTY standing in CHRIS's bedroom. She's listening to the fight, with her headphones around her neck.)

MARILYN

Her mother's a crack-head whore, her father's in jail, her family is a bunch of pigs, god knows what they've done to her! God knows what a man like that—

UNA

A man like what?

MARILYN

You don't know about—

UNA

She's not— I do not want to hear—

MARILYN

You told me you would do something—

UNA

What I said was—

MARILYN

Did you know she's had a baby? No. You didn't know. I didn't want to be the one to tell you. I thought Chris might get around to mentioning it to us. She put it up for adoption.

CHRIS

So what? It's none of your business.

UNA

(to CHRIS) Patty has—

MARILYN

(to UNA) Had. (to CHRIS) She had a baby when she was thirteen years old, and it's none of our business? Thirteen. (to UNA) That's the kind of girl you're letting him get involved with. She has a baby when she's thirteen, what do you think they're doing now, holding hands?

CHRIS

You beast.

MARILYN

(explodes)

Beast! Are you going to allow him to— What kind of a young man—

(as the lights come up on PATTY in CHRIS's room, they continue fading on the hall, until the hall is dark and PATTY is spotlighted.)

UNA

Will you two just quit—

CHRIS

Who do you think you are? What right do you have—

(PATTY puts the headphones on and begins dancing as the music comes up, eventually entirely drowning out MARILYN, CHRIS and

UNA who are shouting the following phrases in improvised variations and fragments over and over at each other. Act ends with PATTY entirely caught up in the music, deaf to the argument beyond the door.)

MARILYN

A baby at thirteen
A father in jail
And you're letting this
You're going to tell me

CHRIS

Where do you get the nerve
What gives you the right
Patty is my girlfriend
Neither one of you has the right.

UNA

Will you two just quit
The two of you
Will you just let up
This is my house, he's my son

2

(Lights come up on basement. PATTY's on the couch covered by a sheet, watching CHRIS arrange a pile of stones in the center of a circle of unlit candles.)

PATTY

What is that supposed to be?

CHRIS

I don't know.

PATTY

I don't get what the thing is with this. What's your problem with her?

CHRIS

Penrose? Are you serious?

PATTY

But you don't have to do this.

CHRIS

What? It's— I'm getting into this. I feel something, putting these stones together, stacking them— Inside this circle— It's like, I don't know, I could get into this.

PATTY

Into what?

CHRIS

I don't know. You don't feel anything?

PATTY

What would I feel?

CHRIS

Come here. Check it out.

PATTY

(joins CHRIS)

Yes.

CHRIS

You don't feel anything?

PATTY

(playing with him)

Oooooooh. Oooooooh.

CHRIS

That's hilarious, Patty. But I'm— Can you indulge me and be serious for one second? What I'm asking is: If you pay attention here, can you feel anything? Sitting inside this circle, beside this arrangement of stones, is it all in my head? Or is there something real? Can you really feel something? Because I— I do.

PATTY

What? What do you feel?

CHRIS

I don't know. I can't name it.

PATTY

Try.

CHRIS

Being inside this circle with me, beside these stones, it doesn't do anything to you?

PATTY

(stretches out in circle)

I could be the sacrificial virgin. Sort of.

CHRIS

(meaning can you quit fooling around and cooperate)

Can you please? Patty?

PATTY
 (meaning she's trying to cooperate)
 I'm trying.

CHRIS
 I feel like we should say something, or do something.

PATTY
 Like?

CHRIS
 Something. Like, we should, you know, channel our energy, Like, this energy *needs* its voice.

PATTY
 You've been hanging with those farm hippies, Chris.

CHRIS
 I'm not hanging with anybody. It's just, like, I feel like we should say something.

PATTY
 You mean like a prayer?

CHRIS
 That's a possibility. What would we pray for?

PATTY
 What do you want?

CHRIS
 I want it to be not about just what I want. Everything's me. You know what I mean: not me, but *me me me*. I want something bigger. Something that's about everything, about everybody. Something big, and we're inside it, we're part of it.

PATTY
 Chris. Your mother, she's a really cool person.

CHRIS
 What's this go to do with my mother? I'm not talking about Penrose. And she is not cool.

PATTY
 It's just, you've already got something big.

CHRIS
 What? What are you talking about?

PATTY
 This is a big house.

CHRIS

We are definitely not on the same wavelength here, Patty. I'm not talking about houses.

PATTY

I know that. It's just, I think your mother—

CHRIS

Don't start with me, Patty. I'm not talking about my mother. I'm talking about this.

PATTY

The circle? The stones inside the circle?

CHRIS

Yes. About energy. About spirit. About the need to give it expression. What about chants? You know any chants?

PATTY

You're getting carried away with this church thing, Chris.

CHRIS

Come on. Do you? Do you know any chants?

PATTY

How would I know any chants? My upbringing seem particularly spiritual to you?

CHRIS

Come on, Patty. We've got to know something.

PATTY

Chris, it's hard to take you seriously.

CHRIS

I am. I'm serious. Listen. Let's just— Could you at least try?

PATTY

All right. I'm serious. Go ahead. Say something.

CHRIS

(strains toward achieving a spiritual state.
Maybe hums or gestures. When he's ready, he
lights a candle and then chants)

In the Church of the Piranha, Patty's father wouldn't be in jail.

PATTY

(lights a candle, also chanting, but in mockery
of CHRIS's seriousness)

In the Church of the Piranha, Chris would be cool with his mother.

(lighting another candle, no longer mocking,
seeing that she may have hurt CHRIS's feelings)

In the Church of the Piranha, Chris's mother would have never left him.

CHRIS

(lighting candle)

In the Church, Patty's father never would have gone crazy on her.

(lighting another)

In the Church, Patty's mother wouldn't do too many drugs and too much whiskey.

PATTY

(lighting sixth candle)

In the Church of the Piranha, my mother would want me around more than she wanted to get high.

CHRIS

(lighting seventh candle)

In the Church of the Piranha, my father wouldn't have quit on me.

(lighting eighth candle)

And I wouldn't have done all the stupid things that made him quit.

PATTY

(lighting ninth candle)

In the Church of the Piranha, no one would give up on anyone. We just wouldn't.

(lighting tenth candle.)

In the Church of the Piranha— In the Church of the Piranha, I wouldn't be trash, in people's eyes.

CHRIS

(lighting eleventh candle)

No one would be trash in anyone's eyes.

PATTY

(indicating last unlit candle)

One.

CHRIS

(lighting a new match for the last candle)

In the Church of the Piranha, my grandfather wouldn't have died, and then my grandmother wouldn't be the way she is.

PATTY

(taking CHRIS's hand and lighting the candle with him)

In the Church of the Piranha, no one would die like that.

CHRIS

Now what? I feel like we should celebrate.

(PATTY pulls CHRIS into her embrace. They fall back onto couch as lights fade on basement and come up on UNA and MARILYN as they enter the

house. CHRIS hears them enter and leaves
PATTY to sneak up to his room.)

UNA
What can I say, Mom? What can I say?

MARILYN
(starting upstairs)
I'm going right to bed. I'm exhausted.

UNA
Excellent idea

MARILYN
He had to wait till we were there. I don't understand that.

UNA
Like I said.

MARILYN
He couldn't have told you before we got to the restaurant? He couldn't
have called?

UNA
He had a gall bladder attack, Mom. What was he supposed to do?

MARILYN
He could have at least given you some warning.

UNA
It happened.

MARILYN
I find it very suspicious. Are you sure?

UNA
It was one evening. It's over. Good night, Mom.

MARILYN
The architect has a gall bladder attack . . .

(at bedroom door, points to Chris's room)

MARILYN (Cont'd)
How do you even know he's in that room? How do you know he's not
out someplace doing God knows!

UNA
He's sleeping. I have no intention of waking him up to make sure he's
sleeping. Good night.

MARILYN

I have half a mind to knock on the door myself. Are you going to the hospital tomorrow?

UNA

Why would I go to the hosp— Yes. Sure. I mean no, actually. David. He asked me not to. He doesn't want me to see him, looking, you know—
— He's a little vain.

MARILYN

A fifty year old man. Is something wrong with him you're not telling?

UNA

Good night, Mom.

(MARILYN retires; UNA goes about straightening up, checking around the house before bed. She makes her way down to the basement, where she finds the circle of candles around the configuration of stones. She kneels down to look them over and is startled when PATTY sits up on the couch. PATTY appears to be naked under a flimsy sheet. She still has headphones around her neck.)

PATTY

Mrs. Penrose? Is that you?

UNA

Patty. I— How'd the ceremony go? I was just admiring the candles.

PATTY

Fine.

UNA

I didn't wake— I mean, you didn't just wake up and find me lurking in the shadows or— I mean, you weren't frightened or—

PATTY

I saw you come down.

UNA

I wouldn't want you to think I was spying.

PATTY

No. Chris told me you inspect the house every night before you go to bed. He says it's a compulsive disorder.

UNA

He does.

PATTY

Chris, you have to talk loud. *You* might even have to shout. He's got some serious issues with you.

UNA

I understand that. He's furious— I came here— He sees it as if I— I don't know. I guess—

PATTY

It's not my business, but— Why'd you do that? I see how you feel, now. I see how much you want, Chris—

UNA

Who do you have who loves you, Patty?

PATTY

Chris.

UNA

Besides Chris.

PATTY

My father, but he's away.

UNA

What about your mother?

PATTY

My mother's sick.

UNA

What about you? Who do you love?

PATTY

You don't want to hear my story, Mrs. Penrose. I love music. I'm going to be a keyboardist.

UNA

I didn't mean music. Do you study piano?

PATTY

I'm going to. I have to get out of my house first, make some money, find a place, take lessons. I'm going to, though. Definitely. I'm going to rock. I'm going to be really good.

UNA

I believe you, Patty. But that's not what I meant. I meant—

PATTY

Why not? I know what you meant. You can love music. I mean, like, *love* music.

UNA

Music can't hold you.

PATTY

Yes it can! That's just the thing about it: it *can* hold you when you need it.

UNA

Not—

PATTY

Yes. Music's like a dream. It's the only place I'm peaceful. It's the only place I'm me. Do you have any idea?

UNA

I guess. All right. That's pretty much how it is when I'm working . . . tinkering.

PATTY

The inventing thing?

UNA

The dreaming-up thing. It's like that. It's like a dreamy place when I'm working, only I'm directing it, the dream. It's like a dream I'm directing, when I really get lost in what I'm doing. *If this piece goes here, and that piece goes there—*

PATTY

That's why you came back here, because you couldn't there for some reason?

UNA

Mostly. That's pretty much— There are other things, though. Sometimes you have to— You have to— Even the ones you love, the ones who love you— Patty— It's impossible to explain. There were nights there were times I thought black rays must be emanating from me, I was so tight and angry. There are ways you just can't go on being. You're awfully young, Patty.

PATTY

Not that young. It's true, what she said, your mother. I did have a baby. I gave it up for adoption.

UNA

How is it that you— Did— Chris shouldn't have reported that back to you. She's just a very cranky old woman, my mother.

PATTY

Slightly. But my mother is not a *crack-head whore*. That's not fair.

UNA

I apologize for her, Patty. But Chris really shouldn't have— My mother— Like I said. She's— She has always latched on to me. A piece of my time, a piece of my heart, that's not so bad, but, came a point— Which

actually has a lot to do with how I wound up in L.A. married to Rick—my ex, Chris's father—in the first place, but— I don't know, maybe you *can* understand. It's: a piece of your time, a piece of your heart, that's one thing—but then it's something more and that's too much. That you can't give and have anything left. Do you have a clue what I'm talking about?

PATTY

Your mother. Chris thinks you let her push you around. It pisses him off, like, serious.

UNA

Why? Why does her— It should be between me and her. Why is Chris so?

PATTY

For him it's about you. And him. I don't know. I thought my family was a mess. Actually, I know what everybody wants a piece of from me.

UNA

What's that?

PATTY

Skin.

UNA

Oh, yeah. Chris too. Sure. Of course. It's the outside when your young. Listen, Patty. I don't mean to— It's just— You do make him use conds.

PATTY

Conds?

UNA

Condoms.

PATTY

Oh yeah. Of course.

UNA

Well, that's good. I just hope. I mean— For you— I hope that, Chris, he's my son, I do love him, but, Patty, everybody wants something from you, and that's not a bad thing, but, you know, everyone will be "just a little bit, just a little" and then— I wound up swimming in a toilet bowl wearing a bikini, and the whole world's like how great— Wait. What were we talking about?

PATTY

Your commercial. I'd love to be in commercials, that'd be so cool.

UNA

I don't think you would really.

PATTY

Why not? Are you kidding?

UNA

It's not what it seems.

PATTY

You make a ton of money. Everybody recognizes you.

UNA

Yes, but— If you had to give up your music for it, would you?

PATTY

No way.

UNA

Well. There you go. They make you give up your music.

PATTY

Why? That's not true.

UNA

It's tricky. It's in the small print. Maybe not for everybody. I don't know. In fact, Patty— I'm really tired. I have hardly any idea what we're talking about. Can I?

(Opens arms for a hug. PATTY hugs her tentatively)

UNA (Cont'd)

I'll be down to wake you up early.

PATTY

Chris said. Don't worry. I don't want to run into her either.

UNA

That's up to you. I'm certainly not asking you to leave. I'd just rather she didn't know you spent the night.

PATTY

Don't worry. It's cool. I don't mind lying when I need to. That's Chris's hang up.

UNA

Yeah, well. I'm going to have to have a talk with *Master*. Is he going to tell me that's not lying?

PATTY

If you could not, you know, hang it on me.

UNA

Good night, Patty.

(UNA exits, goes back upstairs to her desk, where she looks over her diagrams a moment before putting her head down. CHRIS, sticking his head out into the hall and finding silence and darkness, sneaks down the stairs toward the basement. When he's at the door, UNA turns the light on him, catching him a spotlight.)

UNA

Chris.

CHRIS

Whoa. Surprise me. I was just—

UNA

Just what?

CHRIS

I was going down to—

UNA

What?

CHRIS

All right. Busted. So?

UNA

So I told you Patty could stay here the night, but she had to sleep in the basement. You knew what that meant. It meant she could stay here, but you couldn't sleep together here. Not here. Not in the house.

CHRIS

Penrose, this is so hypocritical. Let me make sure I understand. You know we're sleeping together, and you're not telling us not to, but you're insisting we do it, like, in the back seat of the car? In the bushes or something? As long as we don't—

UNA

Just quit it, will you? I'm not arguing about this. If I could tell you not to have sex and you wouldn't I would—if I could I would if I could— Obviously I can't.

CHRIS

Say that again.

UNA

Look, this is *my* house. As long as you're living here, you can follow a few simple rules.

CHRIS

I know this is your house. I did follow the rules. Your rules. I told you one thing, and did another. Or tried anyway. Did I get something wrong? Do what you want, and then lie about it.

UNA

Those are my rules?

CHRIS

You invented David for Grandma because you wanted her out of the house, didn't you? That's the way you operate, Mom. That's the way you've always been. You never have any problem with lying if it's something you want.

(UNA reacts to CHRIS calling her "Mom," but chooses not to call his attention to it.)

UNA

And what about you, *Master*? What about The Church of the Piranha? You know what a fool I feel like? Buying that? Actually trying to convince my mother— It's humiliating.

CHRIS

Did Patty—

UNA

Nevermind about Patty.

CHRIS

What are you two like all buddies?

UNA

I like her, yes. You know, you might note Chris— Do you realize you have never said one single word to me about her?

CHRIS

What are you talking about, Penrose? I never—

UNA

No you haven't. She wants to play piano. She wants to be a keyboardist. She loves music. Not one word. Forget about that she has a child—

CHRIS

She doesn't have a child. She gave it up for adoption.

UNA

That's not even what I'm talking about. Though God knows I'd like to reach the day you trust me enough to tell me that kind of thing.

CHRIS

If that's not what you're talking about—

UNA

I'm talking about Patty. It would be nice to think you see her as someone who loves music, someone who has ambitions, not just some sort of pincushion.

CHRIS

Some sort of what?

UNA

You know what I mean.

CHRIS

You're not— You don't hold it against her, getting pregnant so young?

UNA

Did you think I would? Do you understand I was nineteen when I got pregnant with you?

CHRIS

Nineteen's not— Please. It's not the same thing.

UNA

No it's not. Only, I understand about being pregnant before you're even grown up, that's all. So does your grandmother, for that matter. She was also nineteen.

CHRIS

What is with that woman? Why does she hate Patty so much? Did you know, Dad actually told me he thought I'd like her? What planets do you guys live on?

UNA

Rick and Marilyn always got along. He charmed her. He had money, she was impressed. And he was successful. He had money and he was successful, and he wanted to marry *me*, she couldn't believe her good luck. I don't think she ever thought I deserved him.

CHRIS

You make Dad sound like he's all money and success. He's more than that. I'm just— I know I don't— Your leaving just about wrecked him.

UNA

My staying wasn't doing much for me.

CHRIS

He never even dated another woman for ages. He lost a lot of weight.

UNA

I couldn't help all that.

CHRIS

Why not? Just tell me something. How much did it have something to do with me? I'm not going to get— I'm grown up now. I just really want to know. How much was it about, like, raising a kid. All that time. All that demand.

UNA

You want me to tell you it had nothing to do with it? In the way you're thinking, it didn't, really. It was not about time. I loved you and I do love you. It wasn't about work. It was about this. About what's happening right now. Did I?, you want to know. *Is it me?* you want to know. *Did Dad?* Your father, my mother, you . . . You all just—

CHRIS

What?

UNA

I might as well be a ghost. You, your father, my mother. I love you all, but— It's as if I'm not even—

CHRIS

You've got to be kidding. Is this— What kind of bullshit is this? Is this the story? (mock dramatic) *They don't see the real me. All they care about is themselves. I'll just have to leave and go find my own identity. I know, I'll be an inventor! Or maybe a real actress!*

UNA

Go to hell, Chris.

CHRIS

Penrose! Don't get mad. You think we're all dumb? This is easy; you think we don't get it? I happen to be smart, Penrose. I get it. You've come back to reclaim yourself. To assert your identity, your individuality, your independence. We all get it. Well, maybe not Grandma. But Dad and I. It's not that complicated. And as soon as I can, I will be out of here, out of your hair, and you can act and invent whatever you want. All by yourself, without everybody making demands.

UNA

You think you know, Chris, but you don't. Only the simple part, the idea part, the easy part, which is not really knowing a damn thing.

CHRIS

Oh. Really?

UNA

Yes. Really. Really what you are is a hurt little boy.

CHRIS

Fuck you.

UNA

Don't talk to me like that. I'm not Patty. You don't get to use me and walk all over me as you choose.

CHRIS

Is that what you think?

UNA

Exactly.

CHRIS

You want to be my Mom now? You're going to teach me how to treat my girlfriends. You want to make that demand on me?

UNA

I am your mother. I'm not making demands, and it's not that complicated, as you'd say. You don't get a girl pregnant and then walk away from it, like Vivian in L.A. You don't use a girl because she's vulnerable, like Patty.

CHRIS

(at UNA's desk)

Maybe. Maybe. Still. I don't get why you're doing this. Not just tonight, not just this. The whole six months, my living here. Why? You gave it up. You just explained the reasons. Why now again? You quit. You left to do this.

(knocks her diagrams off the desk)

I understand it. You have to do what you have to do, but not both. Not you anyway. Why are you? What is this?

UNA

(picks up diagrams)

Both. I want both. I need both.

CHRIS

Oh. And you think I can just be your kid again. After— Well, you haven't figured it out. Just, please: I'll be sixteen; I'll be gone.

UNA

I know that, Chris. That's a big part of why.

CHRIS

Please, Mom, come on. You're not—

UNA

Hey. At least you're calling me Mom.

CHRIS

Who called you Mom? Not me.

UNA

Yes you did. You just did.

CHRIS

Bullshit. I did not.

UNA

You did.

CHRIS

I didn't. You're out of your mind.

UNA

All right. Okay. Must have been an auditory hallucination. I just want you to, so—

CHRIS

You're totally a mess, you know that? You and your neat desk, your checking everything before bed. You're not well. Do you realize that except for classes, you hardly ever leave this place? You spend whole days in your work room. You grocery shop on Saturdays. That's your big day out. You're a troubled woman. I feel sorry for you.

UNA

Anything else?

CHRIS

(starts upstairs to his bedroom)

No. Nothing else. Goodnight, *Penrose*.

(UNA goes back to her desk, straightens out diagrams, puts her head down, turns out the light and falls asleep. PATTY sneaks up past her to CHRIS's bedroom. She taps on his door, calls him in whispers. CHRIS, on his bed, lying awake in the dark, bolts up quickly to let her in.)

CHRIS

I'm surprised *Penrose* and the Beast weren't guarding the doors.

PATTY

You said you'd sneak down.

CHRIS

Penrose thinks we should only be together, like, outdoors, or in the back of the car. It's this huge deal somehow if we're in a real, live, flocking, bed

PATTY

You won't give her— Flocking? I think, Chris, it's more about it being in her house than about us being comfortable or anything.

CHRIS

Hey, you know, Patty, what's up with you two? Are you like, in league now? Are you like, in her employ?

PATTY

Listen to you. I'm, I think it's maybe about more than who's comfortable; and you're all like, am I in her employ. What's that? Can't I say anything?

CHRIS

Please, you can say whatever. All I know, Penrose is telling me I'm like all paying no attention to you or something. Like I don't really care about you. And you're telling me I'm not hearing her. Just, what's this about, that's all? Between the two of you, I'm wondering. Is there something wrong with me? Is my hearing going? Am I missing something?

PATTY

Una said you don't pay attention to me? What did she say?

CHRIS

Una? You're on a first-name basis?

PATTY

What am I supposed to call her?

CHRIS

Why not Penrose?

PATTY

That's you. What did she say, though? What did she say about me?

CHRIS

I thought this was about me and you. Why do you care what Penrose thinks about anything?

PATTY

You don't want me to care what your mother thinks?

CHRIS

No. I don't.

PATTY

You only want me to care what you think?

CHRIS

Sort of. I guess. I mean, me-and-you's about me-and-you, right? I don't see why you care what Penrose thinks about anything?

PATTY

Because everything's not all me-and-you. This is just *me*. Like what did she say about *me*. I can care about that.

CHRIS

(Goes to closet)

There any weed left?

PATTY

So? Are you going to tell me?

CHRIS

(rejoins PATTY, goes about rolling a joint)

She said I don't care about your ambitions. Do you have, like, specific ambitions?

PATTY

Are you kidding?

CHRIS

No. I'm not kidding.

PATTY

What about the keyboard? I've only told you a million times I going to be a keyboardist.

CHRIS

(rolling the joint)

Come on, Patty. Be serious. That's MTV. That's *I'm going to be a rock and roll star*. It's teenage fantasy. That's not a real ambition.

PATTY

(talking about the joint CHRIS is rolling)

Hurry up with that.

(takes the papers from him)

Here let me do it. You suck at rolling a joint.

CHRIS

I haven't had as much practice.

PATTY

She say anything about me having a baby? About giving it up?

CHRIS

You talked to her about that?

PATTY

(smoking)

Yeah. Is that okay? Do you mind? You want me to talk to *my* mother about it? Or maybe I should give my father a call?

CHRIS

What about me? Why can't you talk to me?

PATTY

(smoking, getting high)

You want me to talk to you?

CHRIS

Yeah. You can talk to me.

PATTY

You want me to share with you what it's like be twelve years old and start missing your period? (goofing on him) You think you can relate to that?

CHRIS

I can relate to it better than my mother can.

PATTY

(amused) Really?

CHRIS

Patty, you're letting my mother fool you. (toking) This is not a person you can depend upon. In the end, all she really cares about is herself.

PATTY

Maybe we're all like that.

CHRIS

I care about you.

PATTY

Yeah? You love me?

CHRIS

I do. I do love you.

PATTY

You want me to talk to you?

CHRIS

I'm all listening.

PATTY

Okay. First, being pregnant— (looks at CHRIS and laughs) I'm going to explain this to you? You're going to, like, be all understanding?

CHRIS

Give me a chance. Don't be so sexist.

PATTY

Okay. Being pregnant . . . It's like . . . swallowing a watermelon seed.

CHRIS

Give me a break, Patty.

PATTY

Try to imagine, you swallowed a watermelon seed and then it's like, *Whoa, dude, there's a watermelon growing in my belly. How'd that happen?*

CHRIS

That's what being pregnant's like.

PATTY

Yeah. You can relate to that, can't you?

CHRIS

(hostile) And then you have to give it away, the watermelon.

PATTY

No. No, first you have to pass this big watermelon through this tiny opening. Can you—

CHRIS

It doesn't sound—

PATTY

It's not. Try to imagine—

CHRIS

Okay. So, what? You're saying you can't talk to me at all.

PATTY

No. I can talk to you, Chrissy.

CHRIS

(Getting comfortable of the bed, in a good listening position)

So? I want to listen. Honestly.

PATTY

(Moving around the room, toking on spliff.)

Okay, first: I am going to play the keyboard. I am going to be a musician. All right I know yes I know all right all right all right: I've never taken a music lesson. I can't read music. I've never played an instrument. I don't know any musicians. What else? I don't know if I have any talent. Okay, those are the cons. But that's just now, that's just this moment. That's not tomorrow. That *is not* tomorrow. And the pros, I'm still very young. I know it doesn't feel like it sometimes, but fifteen is not old. I still have potential. My mother's all like *drop out of school, you don't go anyway, at least get a job*, (which all that means is that she wants to rip off whatever money I make), but at least in school I can take the music classes—and I would have already I swear to God but you try having a mother who's ODED twice and you wind up calling the cops and riding in the ambulance. See what that does, see what that's like. See where that leaves your head, every time you walk into a room, you're afraid. You see her lying on the couch wiped out, you're afraid. *Mom. Mommy. Are you dead?* You know I figured out a newspaper route