

At rise: There is a table downstage C. with three chairs placed around it. In the stage R. chair sits JAMES, and in the stage L. chair sits ART. The chair between them is empty. ART is holding his head in his hands. After a moment he looks up and sighs heavily.

ART

The thing is, Jim...oh, may I call you Jim? I know it's James, but I like to feel that we're...

(gesticulating with his hands to make his point)

Do you know what I mean?

JAMES

Yeah, yeah.

ART

It just makes it more...I don't know...*real*.

JAMES

Sure.

ART

Especially in a little one-on-one like this.

JAMES

Yeah, no problem.

ART

I'm so glad. I'm Arthur, of course, but...to you, Jim...I am *Art*.

JAMES

Yeah, all right, Art – so what's the problem?

ART

Don't you just hate that word...*problem*?

JAMES

No, not really.

ART

No? Oh, I do – *loathe* it. Anyway...the reason I wanted to have this little chat with you, Jim, is because...well, first off, let me say this has absolutely nothing to do with your performance this evening.

JAMES

Okay.

ART

Nothing. Zero. Zip.

JAMES

Well...that's good.

ART

Because what you have to offer is nothing short of...sensational.

JAMES

Really?

ART

Oh, yes. I would describe you as a *major* talent.

JAMES

*Really?*

ART

Quite remarkable.

JAMES

Wow!

ART

Don't sound so surprised. Surely you're aware of the extraordinary gifts you possess?

JAMES

Well, I...you know...I suppose we all like to think we have...*something*.

ART

I'm more inclined to think that you, Jim, have everything...and more besides.

JAMES

Woah! That's amazing. Can you really tell...I mean...just from what you've seen tonight?

ART

I have been in this business for *many* years, Jim. Many, many years. I've seen it all. But rarely do I ever come across...whatever it is that you have.

JAMES

I'm...I don't know what to say. I'm humbled.

ART

Be humbled, Jim. But not by my words – by your own brilliance.

JAMES

And you could see all that...here tonight.

ART

Oh, yes. I was watching you *very* carefully. *You* specifically.

JAMES

Wow. Good job I didn't know or I'd have probably been, you know...thrown off.

ART

Yes. Which rather brings me to the main reason for this little tête-à-tête.

JAMES

Okay.

ART

You see, it would be remiss of me, regardless of your bountiful talents, if I didn't point out...

(sighs heavily)

Oh, how do I put this without sounding harsh?

(beat)

Areas for improvement?

JAMES

Well, yeah, of course. I mean, you're the director.

ART

Yes. Yes, I am, Jim. The success or failure of the entire production rests on my shoulders alone. It is an *immense* responsibility that would *crush* a lesser man.

ART (Cont'd)

And I do not take it lightly. And for that reason alone, I am forced return to that most vile of all words...*problem*.

JAMES

Well, if it's not right, you know...you gotta let me know.

ART

Yes. Yes, I must.

(suddenly stands and clasps his head in his hands)

God, I hate my job sometimes!

JAMES

No, no, it's okay, really. I...I don't mind.

ART

But *I* mind, Jim. *I* mind. It all just seems so ridiculous somehow, don't you think? All this finding fault and criticizing, when all you really want to do is enjoy everything your eyes are bearing witness to...to be swept away in its rapture.

JAMES

Not if there's a fault, no.

ART

Oh, this mad, insane profession! *Why* did I allow it to seduce me?

JAMES

I expect...because you love it, Art.

ART sits back down in his chair and regains his composure.

ART

Yes.

(beat)

Yes, I suspect you're right, Jim. It may have taken me by force, but...ever since, I've been smitten – prostrate and yielding to its every whim.

JAMES

Yeah, well, so um...what's the problem?

ART

Ah, yes, the, um...*problem*. Yes, well...uh...perhaps this would be a good time to bring in Stephanie.