

**Art Stripped Naked**

a comedy by

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## Art Stripped Naked

### Cast of Characters

**Eddie:** Mid-sixties to early seventies, a curmudgeonly sort, and sometimes it's hard to tell if he's going senile or just fucking with your mind. He's wearing Sansabelt slacks, short-sleeved white buttondown open at the throat, air-pressure gauge in shirt pocket, perhaps sandals but *with* socks.

**Arthur:** Eddie's son, late twenties to early thirties, jeans, black T-shirt with paint stains, black sneakers, probably has a goatee.

**Holly:** Arthur's ex-girlfriend, mid-twenties to early thirties, pretty, "vintage" dress and sneakers or Docs, maybe a cool Art Deco sort of purse.

**Dennis:** Delivery guy, early to late twenties, dressed in new workman's coveralls (Dickies, whatever), short hair, no affectations to hint at his sexual orientation but you might get the feeling that "this guy is just too well-groomed to be hetero."

### Setting

The living room of Eddie's modest one-bedroom apartment, rather blandly furnished---but there are more interesting books and art prints than you might suspect a retired mechanic would have. Eddie is typically seated in his favorite easy chair and reading some literary magazine.

## Act I

### Scene 1

ARTHUR

(Outside the front door, excited and knocking.)

Dad! Hey, *Dad!*

EDDIE

Come in, come in.

ARTHUR

(Entering, walking over to EDDIE)

Dad---

EDDIE

Hello, son.

ARTHUR

Dad---

EDDIE

(Raises his hand pre-emptorily.)

Wait. Let me hazard a guess, here. Before you begin, son. Let me unleash a hypothesis that might chase down and grind between its molars the reason for your visit. Please. (Beat.) There's some matter of money, is there?

ARTHUR

No, Dad, I don't need any money, I---

EDDIE

It's your truck, then, is it? Some manner of mechanical difficulty? A problem rendering you immobile until repairs can be affected?

ARTHUR

No, Dad, I---

EDDIE

Until the old man can affect those repairs, in fact? With the sweat of his brow and the knowledge gained from years of labor. Is that right?

ARTHUR

No, Dad, my truck is fine. *Everything* is fine. In fact, it's better than fine. I've got some great news, Dad.



ARTHUR

Yes, Dad, it---

EDDIE

What kind of sense does that make? The Uptown Gallery is downtown? That makes no sense at all.

ARTHUR

Dad. What do you---

EDDIE

Not a lick of sense.

ARTHUR

But that's the point, Dad, don't you see?

EDDIE

I see no points.

ARTHUR

It's *irony*, Dad. They're being *ironic*. They're playing off the concepts of uptown and downtown, don't you see? It's a kind of commentary on---

EDDIE

You're going to have a show there? At this Uptown Gallery?

ARTHUR

Yes, Dad, I am! A one-man show. It's kind of a big deal, actually, because usually they have at least three-artist shows, or group shows, or at least themed exhibits. But I'll be the only artist in this show, and they're going to have a media reception and everything. The whole works, Dad!

EDDIE

My son. A one-man show of his paintings. At the Uptown Gallery.

ARTHUR

That's right.

EDDIE

The Uptown Gallery *downtown*.

ARTHUR

Exactly.

EDDIE

I don't believe it.

ARTHUR  
What?

EDDIE  
I find this a difficult notion to accept.

ARTHUR  
Dad. What do---

EDDIE  
At present this notion does not mesh too well with my established worldview.

ARTHUR  
Dad. Do you think I'm lying to you? Do you think I'm making this up?

EDDIE  
I fear. . .

ARTHUR  
*You fear? You fear what?*

EDDIE  
I am *concerned*, rather.

ARTHUR  
What? What are you concerned about?

EDDIE  
I am concerned, albeit slightly, that my son is jumping to a conclusion. That perhaps he assumes an offer has been made that is not precisely the offer that has actually been made. *Vis-à-vis* his paintings. *Vis-à-vis* their being exhibited in this Uptown Gallery downtown.

ARTHUR  
Dad, I'm not jumping to any conclusions, okay? I know exactly what I'm talking about, here.

EDDIE  
Perhaps. . .?

ARTHUR  
Yes?

EDDIE  
Perhaps you could explain this situation to the old man. Perhaps you could relate the circumstances leading up to this alleged exhibit.

ARTHUR

For Chrissakes, Dad, it's not *alleged*!

EDDIE

You could set your father's mind to ease. You could show him the needlessness of his aged yet canny cynicism---by describing the events leading up to this hypothetical show.

ARTHUR

It's not *hypothetical*, Dad! Jesus Christ! It's not---

EDDIE

Or you could choose otherwise: you could choose not to.

ARTHUR

Dad. . .

EDDIE

Certainly the time has long since passed when the father could do more than merely suggest to the son. Certainly the days are long gone when unquestioned parental authority would obtain in a given situation.

ARTHUR

Dad. (Beat.) Okay. Listen, you want me to tell you, I'll---

EDDIE

In the interests of objectivity.

ARTHUR

Okay, Ill tell you. Okay? I'll---

EDDIE

Purely in the interests of objectivity.

ARTHUR

Yes, okay, the interests of objectivity, Dad! (Beat.) Okay? *Okay?*

EDDIE

Proceed.

ARTHUR

Okay. I was at this party the other night.

EDDIE

You were at this party.

ARTHUR

Yes. I was at this party, and---

EDDIE

What night was this?

ARTHUR

What? I don't know---it's not important.

EDDIE

It's not important? The night of this party is not important?

ARTHUR

No, it's not important, Dad. I mean, *yes*, of *course* it's important. But I don't remember exactly, okay? The important thing is, I was at the party, and---

EDDIE

Was it the weekend?

ARTHUR

Dad, I'm trying to---

EDDIE

Because most parties, as I recall from my youth, take place during the weekend. So perhaps this party did as well.

ARTHUR

(Frowning at his father.)

Dad, look.

EDDIE

I'm just trying to be helpful, here. The old man is merely attempting to assist his son.

ARTHUR

Okay. Okay, it was Friday---okay? It was last Friday night.

EDDIE

Ah. Last Friday night. The weekend.

ARTHUR

Yes, okay: *the weekend*. (Rolls his eyes.) And I was there, at the party, and I was talking to James. You know my friend James?

EDDIE

James, James. The tall one with the hair thing?

ARTHUR  
No, that's Mark.

EDDIE  
James, right? You did say James?

ARTHUR  
I said James.

EDDIE  
I don't believe I've had the pleasure.

ARTHUR  
Okay, it doesn't really matter. But, anyway, I was talking to James---

EDDIE  
He's not the short one with the lip thing, is he?

ARTHUR  
The lip thing?

EDDIE  
The lip thing. You know: the hare lip. The deviated septic.

ARTHUR  
Septum.

EDDIE  
Pardon?

ARTHUR  
Deviated *septum*, Dad. It's called a *deviated septum*.

EDDIE  
Oh yes, of course: septum. Is that him? Is that James?

ARTHUR  
No, that's not James.

EDDIE  
Well, who is it, then? With the lip thing? The deviated septum?

ARTHUR  
I have no idea who you're talking about.

EDDIE

Oh. Very well, then. (Beat.) Proceed.

ARTHUR

So I'm at this party, and I'm talking to James. And I'm telling him about the painting I just finished. And this guy comes up to say hello to James. And James says to me, "*Here's* the man you should be talking to about your paintings."

EDDIE

Why does he say that?

ARTHUR

Dad. I'm about to tell you, okay?

EDDIE

Oh. Very good. Go ahead, then.

ARTHUR

So, I---

EDDIE

Don't let me interrupt you.

ARTHUR

Dad!

EDDIE

Proceed, proceed!

ARTHUR

So, okay, I introduce myself to this guy. And it turns out that he's one of the guys who own the Uptown Gallery. And we get to talking about my paintings, because James is really egging me on and making it seem like I'm some sort of genius.

EDDIE

He sounds like a very good friend, this James.

ARTHUR

Oh, he's the best.

EDDIE

Too bad about his lip.

ARTHUR

What?

EDDIE

Humor. The old man attempts a joke.

ARTHUR

Oh. (Beat.) So, *anyway*, this guy from the Gallery, his name is Upton, and he's---

EDDIE

That's a bit much, isn't it?

ARTHUR

What?

EDDIE

This fellow who owns the Uptown Gallery, this fellow's name is *Upton*? That's a bit much, don't you think? Don't you think that's a bit much?

ARTHUR

Dad, it's just a coincidence.

EDDIE

What's this fellow's last name? *Downtown*? This fellow's name is Upton *Downtown*, is that it?

ARTHUR

Dad, don't be ridiculous. His name is Jeremy Upton, okay? He just happens to be one of the guys who owns the Uptown Gallery.

EDDIE

A coincidence. It's a coincidence.

ARTHUR

That's right. That's all that it is. (Beat.) Anyway, because of all the stuff James is telling him, Upton says he'd like to have a look at my paintings sometime. And maybe he really means it, or maybe it's just something he always says---to be social, you know? To be nice at a party. But I figure, hey, this is not an opportunity to let get away, right? This is a chance to strike while the iron is hot. Because, you know, I keep some of my paintings in my truck, because there's not a lot of room in my apartment. So I tell this Upton guy that I've got some paintings outside, and he can see them right now if he wants to. And I guess I was kind of putting him on the spot, and maybe it would've been a bad move, but---

EDDIE

But you've got to strike while the iron is hot!

ARTHUR

Exactly.

EDDIE

Just as I've always told you.

ARTHUR

That's right, Dad.

EDDIE

The old man's wisdom is not completely lost on the son.

ARTHUR

That's right, Dad.

EDDIE

That's my boy.

ARTHUR

So, anyway, Upton comes out to the truck with me and James. And I'm showing him the paintings, and they're, like, they're blowing him away, Dad.

EDDIE

He likes them.

ARTHUR

He *loves* them! He says he was a bit wary about actually coming out and looking at them at first, but that they're really very good. And James tells him about the other paintings I have in storage, and Upton thinks about this for a minute, and then he asks me if I'd like to have a show at the Uptown Gallery downtown.

EDDIE

That's remarkable. That's really quite remarkable.

ARTHUR

Well, it's mostly because the artist they already had scheduled, this guy from San Diego, he had to pull out at the last minute. And the Gallery's been going a little nuts trying to find a replacement for him. And so, because I was at the right place at the right time. . .

EDDIE

You have a show.

ARTHUR

I have a show.

EDDIE

Well, that's an excellent turn of events. That is really something. (Beat.) Congratulations, son.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Dad.

EDDIE

And when is this show to open?

ARTHUR

Two weeks from now. There's going to be a big media reception Friday night.

EDDIE

Two weeks from now you've got a show at the Uptown Gallery.

ARTHUR

Yes sir.

EDDIE

The Uptown Gallery *downtown*.

ARTHUR

(Beaming, now.)

That's right.

(Beat.)

EDDIE

Do you mind if I ask you something? A little question?

ARTHUR

Go right ahead.

EDDIE

Do you have this in writing?

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

Because you can never be too sure about these things, you know.

ARTHUR

Dad, believe me, it's all taken care of.

EDDIE

Because if it's not in writing, they can---they can stick a knife in your back. You know that, don't you? They can stick a knife right in your back.

ARTHUR

Dad, there's no knife. Everything is set, okay? Trust me on this one.

EDDIE

I should trust you.

ARTHUR

I know what I'm doing.

EDDIE

A father should trust his son.

ARTHUR

That's right: a father should trust his son.

(Beat.)

EDDIE

We'll see.

## Scene 2

ARTHUR

(At the front door, as in Scene 1, but he's not too joyful this time.)

Dad!

EDDIE

Come in, come in.

ARTHUR

(Entering the apartment.)

Hi, Dad.

EDDIE

Here, sit down. Have a seat. Here.

ARTHUR

(Sits in the chair next to EDDIE's chair.)

EDDIE

Would you like something to drink, son?

ARTHUR

No, thanks.

EDDIE  
Some water, at least?

ARTHUR  
Thanks, I'm not really thirsty.

EDDIE  
Well, then. So. How are things with you?

ARTHUR  
I missed you at the opening last night, Dad.

EDDIE  
The. . .opening?

ARTHUR  
For my art show.

EDDIE  
Your. . . ?

ARTHUR  
My art show at the Uptown Gallery last night.

EDDIE  
Oh. Oh yes, of course: your show, the opening. Last night, was it? I was, ah, there was something I. . .

ARTHUR  
You don't have to make any excuses, okay, Dad?

EDDIE  
It must have slipped my mind. It really must have slipped the old man's mind. So much going on these days, so many responsibilities in these trying times.

ARTHUR  
Dad. It's no big deal, okay? I just thought you were going to be there.

EDDIE  
Shame. Shame upon the house of the old man.

ARTHUR  
Dad.

EDDIE

Was it a successful opening?

ARTHUR

It was great, Dad. God, it was incredible! I had no idea it was going to be such a big deal. Everybody was there---all the reviewers from the papers, other gallery owners, local artists, everybody was there.

EDDIE

Your paintings were well-received, were they?

ARTHUR

People loved them, Dad! I wouldn't be surprised if a few of them, if one or two of them, sold.

EDDIE

Well, that's wonderful. That's truly wonderful, son. Pride wells up in the old man's heart.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Dad.

EDDIE

That's my boy.

ARTHUR

Thanks, Dad.

EDDIE

Chip off the old block.

ARTHUR

You know who else was there?

EDDIE

Wait. Don't give it away. Let the old man guess.

ARTHUR

You'll never get it.

EDDIE

It was your friend James, was it?

ARTHUR

James?

EDDIE

James. Your friend James was there.

ARTHUR

Of course James was there, Dad. God, he was practically responsible for me getting the show in the first place.

EDDIE

Not James, then.

ARTHUR

No, not James.

EDDIE

Well, then. Well.

ARTHUR

Do you want me to tell you?

EDDIE

That Upton fellow---*he* was there.

ARTHUR

Dad, of course Jeremy Upton was there---it's his gallery.

EDDIE

Not Upton, then. Not James, not Upton. Perhaps this will require further thought.

ARTHUR

Dad, do you want me to tell you?

EDDIE

Do I seem incapable to you, is that it? The old man is to be put out to pasture so quickly?

ARTHUR

Holly was there, Dad.

EDDIE

Holly was there. Holly?

ARTHUR

You remember---my old girlfriend, Holly.

EDDIE

Holly. Holly? Oh yes: Holly. The one who dumped you.

ARTHUR

She didn't dump me, Dad. Things just didn't work out.

EDDIE

Holly. I remember now. Holly. She dumped you for that bass player.

ARTHUR

Dad, she didn't dump me for any bass player. We were having problems long before she met him, okay? It was just---a coincidence, that's all it was. It was a total coincidence.

EDDIE

A coincidence. This bass player.

ARTHUR

That's right, it was a coincidence.

EDDIE

Yes, it's all flooding back, now. Bass player, bass player. Sanford---that's his name.

ARTHUR

Dad, how do you---

EDDIE

Drives a nice little car, is that right? Little black Chevy Nova.

ARTHUR

What?

EDDIE

Eight cylinders, 1975, a really beautiful car.

ARTHUR

How do you know what kind of car he drives?

EDDIE

Well, these things take care, of course. Care and attention. Such as might be rendered by an old man with knowledge from years of mechanical labor. Even the best of cars must---

ARTHUR

I don't believe this.

EDDIE

Son, you cannot deny the truth. Consider at least the laws of thermodynamics. Even the best of automotive systems requires a certain amount of---

ARTHUR

I can't believe you'd work on his car! Jesus Christ, Dad. I can't believe you'd work on the car of the guy Holly dumped me for.

EDDIE

It was an emergency, son. It required a swift and efficient response.

ARTHUR

I don't believe this.

EDDIE

His car was broken down, he was miles from a garage. Holly was very concerned. Holly was beside herself with agitation.

ARTHUR

So she called you?

EDDIE

She came over.

ARTHUR

She came to get you? To fix Sanford's car?

EDDIE

That's correct. Yes, that's precisely how it happened.

ARTHUR

And she remembered how to get here, huh? From when we used to visit you?

EDDIE

I see her about twice a month, actually.

ARTHUR

What?

EDDIE

Holly visits me twice a month.

ARTHUR

You're kidding, right? You're making a little joke.

EDDIE

Ever since you broke up, she's been coming over about once every two weeks. Approximately.

ARTHUR

Dad. Why in the hell would---

EDDIE

Just to visit, to talk about things. We always did get along well together. You used to remark on that all the time.

ARTHUR

Yeah---before she dumped me for that fucking bass player.

EDDIE

Precisely.

ARTHUR

I don't believe this.

EDDIE

I'm sorry if I've done anything to upset you. It was not the old man's intent to cause his son any undue, ah, concern.

ARTHUR

I really don't believe this.

EDDIE

Shame upon the house of the old man.

ARTHUR

Jesus Christ, Dad.

(Beat.)

EDDIE

So. She was there.

ARTHUR

What?

EDDIE

Holly was at the opening of your show.

ARTHUR

Yeah, she---look. Let's forget about it, okay? I don't even want to think about it anymore.

EDDIE

Yes, I understand. Very good. Better to let the tragedies of the past disintegrate among the winds of time.

ARTHUR

Yeah, something like that.

EDDIE

Better to let sleeping dogs lie.

ARTHUR

That's right.

EDDIE

But---your show. The opening was a success?

ARTHUR

It sure was.

EDDIE

Wonderful! And was there, perhaps, a particularly favored piece?

ARTHUR

As a matter of fact, Dad. As a matter of fact: yes, there was.

EDDIE

Yes? A painting which stood head and shoulders above the others in the crowd's estimation?

ARTHUR

That's right.

EDDIE

Share this with the old man.

ARTHUR

Well, it's my most recent painting, Dad. The one I was telling James about at the party when Upton walked up.

EDDIE

Yes?

ARTHUR

It's a self-portrait.

EDDIE

Ah. Excellent. The artist turned back upon himself.

ARTHUR

Exactly, Dad. It's a portrait of me as Adam. You know---from the garden of Eden? (Beat.) See, there's this painting by Clarence Billings Hedgerow, from 1632, that shows Adam and Eve? Well, I repainted the scene, in as close to Hedgerow's style as I could get, except that Eve's not there at all. And *I'm* Adam. And where the fig leaf is---well, you know how they always paint a fig leaf over the genitals? Except, actually, this one was a grape leaf or something, it was on some kind of vine. Anyway, in *my* painting the leaf is gone and there's just blank canvas *in the shape of the leaf* in its place. See? And the leaf itself is painted and in a separate frame attached to the bottom right corner of the main painting. You see what I'm saying?

EDDIE

I see what you're saying. (Beat.) And this was the darling of the night's gathered throng? This painting was, you might say, the belle of the ball?

ARTHUR

This is the one I thought was the best, too. I mean, hell, Dad, I named the whole exhibit after the title of the painting.

EDDIE

And that is...?

ARTHUR

Dad, I already told you. I sent you a postcard, didn't I?

EDDIE

A postcard.

ARTHUR

The gallery had a bunch of postcards printed up. I sent you one, didn't I?

EDDIE

Oh. Yes. The postcard. (Beat.) Perhaps it's been misplaced.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

Or forgotten, most likely. (He shakes his head.) Age, son. The ravages of time are a difficult cross to bear.

ARTHUR

C'mon, Dad, gimme a break. You know very well---

EDDIE

*Remind* the old man. Assist him, at least, in his time of need.

ARTHUR  
Dad. It's called "Art Stripped Naked."

EDDIE  
"Art Stripped Naked?"

ARTHUR  
That's right. "Art Stripped Naked."

EDDIE  
"Art Stripped Naked." That's the title of the painting?

ARTHUR  
And the name of the show.

EDDIE  
"Art Stripped Naked."

ARTHUR  
Yeah, exactly---see? Because it's a commentary on art and censorship and---

EDDIE  
"Art Stripped Naked."

ARTHUR  
Yes. And because it's a self-portrait, too, see? It plays off my name.

EDDIE  
Your name is Arthur.

ARTHUR  
My name is *Art*, Dad. Okay? People have called me Art for years. *Everybody* calls me that.

EDDIE  
*I* don't call you that.

ARTHUR  
Jesus Christ, Dad, you don't call me *anything*. You usually refer to me in the third person. You usually refer to *yourself* in the third person.

EDDIE  
I have always called you Arthur.

ARTHUR  
People call me Art, now, Dad.

EDDIE

Your mother, God rest her soul, always called you Arthur.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

It was her father's name, did you know that?

ARTHUR

Dad, listen---

EDDIE

She insisted that you be named after her father.

ARTHUR

Dad, I know it was Grand-dad's name, okay? But now people---

EDDIE

I wanted to name you after my own father, of course. But, no, your mother would have none of it. Too German, she said. No American boy wants to go around with a name like Heinrich, she said. It was like part of the Holocaust, she said: it would cause. . .trauma.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

Trauma! Can you believe she would say such a thing, your mother? That my father's name would cause *trauma*. Where did she get these ideas, I wonder. Where did she get these wild notions? From thin air! She'd pull these things from thin air, things about trauma, about where to park the car, about---my God, about the *towels*!

ARTHUR

Towels?

EDDIE

The *dishtowels*. You remember? No, of course you don't---you weren't even born. You were too young to remember.

ARTHUR

What about the dishtowels?

EDDIE

They had stripes. They were *striped* dishtowels. White dishtowels with blue stripes running the long way down them. We used them in the sink. Both of us used them, you understand. I was never one to insist upon the woman doing the dishes. Not even back then, before all this, this

liberation. (Beat.) It seemed only fair, after all, to divide the household chores between us, when I was daily released from working at the garage. Your mother, of course, had been attending to the needs of our domestic life, to all the quotidian details. She'd been taking care of your sister Frieda. So after supper each night we would wash the dishes together. I would wash, and your mother would dry. Or she would wash, and I would---

ARTHUR

Dad, what about the *towels*?

EDDIE

The father is incapable, is that the implication here? The father is incapable of relating to the son the information requested?

ARTHUR

Dad, I just---

EDDIE

I am *talking* about the towels. (Beat.) The towels would become wet, you see. Either because it was a towel that was used for *drying*, and in drying it perforce absorbed moisture to the point of saturation. . . .or it was a towel used for *washing*, and was therefore constantly, soppingly, *wet*. So we would have to wring these towels out. Either while we were still washing and drying, or afterward. We would have to wring the towels *out*, do you see?

ARTHUR

You'd have to wring the towels out.

EDDIE

Precisely. But your mother would never wring them out horizontally. (Beat.) She refused to wring them out horizontally.

ARTHUR

How do you mean, horizontally?

EDDIE

Are you listening to me? Does the father speak to a brick wall lately grown to resemble his son?

ARTHUR

I'm *listening*, Dad. What are you---

EDDIE

The towels had blue stripes going down them the long way. Vertically, do you see? They weren't even a different thread, the stripes: they were printed on. Or they were dyed on. The cloth of the fabric was the same everywhere: *this* is my point. The stripes were merely *added color*, do you see?

ARTHUR

Okay, yes. The stripes were just added color. So?

EDDIE

So when your mother wrung out the towels, she would wring them out so that the water would run down the stripes. Invariably, she would do this. *Down* the stripes, do you see?

ARTHUR

*Down* the stripes.

EDDIE

*Down* the stripes! And it wasn't so much that she would do this, invariably, but that when I pointed this out---an innocent observation, you can be sure, the old man merely *commenting* to his wife---when I pointed this out to her, your mother insisted that what she was doing was perfectly sensible. She insisted that *I* was the foolish one. She insisted that the towels got *drier* her way.

ARTHUR

Really?

EDDIE

*Drier*. She insisted.

ARTHUR

Wow, that's---

EDDIE

I attempted to reason with her, son. I attempted to illuminate the truth of the matter, vis-à-vis the stripes. I demonstrated my contentions, I demonstrated them point by logical point. Water running *down* the stripes, water running *across* the stripes. Half the towel *wet*, half the towel *dry*. Point by logical point, son. But your mother *refused*. (Beat.) She refused to listen to reason. (Beat.) *She refused to wring the towels horizontally*.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

Not *once*.

ARTHUR

Hey. . .Dad?

EDDIE

Never. She would never wring the towels horizontally.

(Beat.)

ARTHUR

Dad, listen---

EDDIE

It about drove me mad, those goddam towels. (Beat.) Eventually I threw them out. (Beat.) Bought *new* towels. (Beat.) Solid *white* towels. (Beat.) Not a stripe among them.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

(The memory's pulling him away from the present.)

She never said a word. Your mother never said a word about the new towels, in all the years we had after that. Not a goddam word.

ARTHUR

Dad, listen---

EDDIE

(He's getting maudlin, here.)

She was a wonderful woman, your mother.

ARTHUR

I know, Dad.

EDDIE

She was so bright. So beautiful. She was. . .

ARTHUR

Dad? (Beat.) Dad, are you okay?

EDDIE

You'd better go, now. The old man. . .the old man needs to be alone.

ARTHUR

Dad, are you sure?

EDDIE

Yes. Yes, I'm sure.

ARTHUR

Dad?

EDDIE

Go. Go on---off with you, now.

ARTHUR  
(Rises from the chair.)

I love you, Dad.

EDDIE

Thank you, son.

ARTHUR

I'll see you soon, okay, Dad?

EDDIE  
(Nods.)

ARTHUR  
Okay. See you later, then. (ARTHUR heads for the door.) Bye. Bye, Dad. (He exits.)

EDDIE

Goodbye, son.

(EDDIE looks offstage, lost in despondent memory.)

### Scene 3

EDDIE

(He's sitting in his chair, reading the latest issue of Harper's. There is a knock on the door. EDDIE looks at the door over the top of his magazine. There is another knock.)

Come in, come in.

HOLLY

(Enters, walks over to EDDIE.)

Hi, Eddie!

EDDIE

(Rising to meet HOLLY; as they hug briefly.)

Top of the afternoon to you, my dear.

HOLLY

(Seating herself in the chair next to EDDIE.)

You're never going to lock that door, are you?

EDDIE

(Re-seats himself.)

The door, always the door. Dear Holly.

HOLLY

Eddie. You know this neighborhood isn't as safe as it used to be.

EDDIE

So you tell me, my dear, almost every time you visit. The neighborhood isn't safe. The criminal element spreads like a cancer. Ruthless thugs may attempt to rob the old man, to bludgeon him and leave him for dead among the patterns of the faded carpet.

HOLLY

Well, you can never be too safe.

EDDIE

Better safe than sorry.

HOLLY

Exactly, Eddie. Better safe than sorry.

EDDIE

However, I am *not* sorry. I take the risks into account---you can trust me on this. I weigh what you have told me. I accept the facts of the world as I know them, and I respond accordingly.

HOLLY

By not keeping your door locked.

EDDIE

(Smiling almost slyly.)

I have always lived this way, and this is the way I will always live.

HOLLY

(Grinning, shaking her head slowly.)

God, I love you, Eddie. You're something else.

EDDIE

I'm something else?

HOLLY

You're a gem. You're absolutely beautiful.

EDDIE

Ah. I knew there was a reason I was pleased to see you. It all comes flooding back, now.

HOLLY

So, how are you doing?

EDDIE

I'm fine, my dear, I'm perfectly fine.

HOLLY  
You didn't go to Art's opening.

EDDIE  
That's correct. I decided against it.

HOLLY  
I thought you were going to be there. You told me you were considering it.

EDDIE  
Precisely: I was considering it. In the end, my consideration led me to stay home.

HOLLY  
Oh.

EDDIE  
But I understand it was a great success.

HOLLY  
It sure seemed like a success. Everybody was real impressed with his new work. He's gotten a lot better.

EDDIE  
Since the last time you saw him.

HOLLY  
Uh, yeah, he's---he's really improved since then.

EDDIE  
Not a matter of cause and effect, I'm sure.

HOLLY  
Well, no---of course not. (She tsks, rolls her eyes.) Eddie. He's just been working very hard lately. You can tell---it's obvious from the paintings.

EDDIE  
They meet with your approval, then, these paintings?

HOLLY  
Oh, they were great!

EDDIE  
And was there one you found particularly outstanding?

HOLLY

Oh, definitely. It's this one he did called "Death & Company." It's---

EDDIE

Not "Art Stripped Naked?"

HOLLY

What?

EDDIE

"Art Stripped Naked." The painting that he named the show after, I believe.

HOLLY

Oh, yeah, well, that one was great, too. It just didn't, I don't know, it didn't hit me like it was hitting everybody else. It just seemed a bit too. . . *gimmicky* to me, you know? Too self-referential.

EDDIE

Self-referential.

HOLLY

I mean, Art's working with a lot of visual displacements, a lot of manipulated images. Not that there's anything wrong with manipulated images, per se. It's just that, when they focus on something outside him, it's. . . well, it just works a lot better for me, that's all. It's probably because I know him so well. So when he includes himself in the context of the work like that, it's just. . . well. . .

EDDIE

Too gimmicky?

HOLLY

Yeah. *Way* too gimmicky. For *me*, anyway.

EDDIE

The use of a nude self-portrait as a statement regarding censorship, however. Particularly when one considers the double meaning inherent in his name. That doesn't appeal to you? That doesn't seem at least. . . well, *clever*, for lack of a better word?

HOLLY

That's just it, Eddie---it's *too* clever. It's too clever for its own good.

EDDIE

Ah.

HOLLY

I mean, not that there's anything wrong with it at all, objectively speaking. Most people seemed blown away by the piece, really. It just didn't hit *me* the same way. I was a lot more impressed by "Death & Company."

EDDIE

"Death & Company."

HOLLY

It's this painting of Sylvia Plath's gravesite---you know Sylvia Plath?

EDDIE

She's a poet?

HOLLY

That's right.

EDDIE

Stuck her head in the oven?

HOLLY

(Rolling her eyes.)

Yes, that's her. (Beat.) It's a painting of her gravesite---very realistic, almost like a photograph. And there's this shadow where the---

EDDIE

That seems morbid to me.

HOLLY

Well, I guess it is, kind of. But it's really---

EDDIE

Extremely morbid: that's how it seems to me.

HOLLY

You really think so?

EDDIE

I have always thought everything about that woman was extremely morbid. Head in the oven, dying is an art, so on and so forth: extremely morbid. I'm glad to know that something Arthur has painted delights you so much. But, please---spare the old man.

HOLLY

Really?

As a favor to me.

EDDIE

Sure, Eddie.

HOLLY

(Beat.)

EDDIE

Arthur told me that you had attended the opening.

HOLLY

Yeah?

EDDIE

He was here earlier today, and he told me. He preferred not to talk about it, though. He seemed a bit upset.

HOLLY

Upset?

EDDIE

I believe it was because I told him that you've been visiting me.

HOLLY

That upset him?

EDDIE

Well, perhaps not.

HOLLY

No?

EDDIE

Perhaps it wasn't that. Perhaps it was the other thing.

HOLLY

What other thing?

EDDIE

Well, I happened to mention Sanford. Perhaps that was a mistake. I happened to mention that I assisted in the repair of Sanford's car.

HOLLY

Eddie. Did you happen to mention that that was over *six months* ago?

EDDIE

No, in fact I did not.

HOLLY

Did you happen to mention that Sanford and I split up *two* months ago? Or that he's moved to Seattle?

EDDIE

I'm afraid these things escaped the old man, my dear. So much information to keep track of in this complex life.

HOLLY

Well, I didn't talk to Art at the opening. I wanted to, but it was really awkward, you know? There were so many people there last night. We just sort of smiled and nodded at each other. He did seem surprised to see me, though.

EDDIE

I never told him that you would be in attendance. Vis-à-vis our agreement about that.

HOLLY

Thank you, Eddie.

EDDIE

The old man is not such a slouch, after all.

HOLLY

You're not a slouch at all, Eddie. I just wish. . .

EDDIE

Yes?

HOLLY

I don't know.

EDDIE

You don't know what you wish?

HOLLY

I wish things were different.

EDDIE

Concerning yourself and Arthur?

HOLLY

Yeah, I. . .I don't know, I---



HOLLY

Eddie, you can't buy one of his paintings anonymously.

EDDIE

There's a problem here?

HOLLY

Eddie, that's not fair to Art. I mean, he'll think he's sold a painting to someone he doesn't know, that it's a legitimate sale.

EDDIE

That is precisely my point.

HOLLY

I don't think you'd be doing him a favor, Eddie. I don't think you'd be giving him a gift, I really don't. Even if he never found out that it was you, it would just seem too weird, you know? Besides, it'd be like you're taking pity on him---which he doesn't need. His work needs to stand on its own. It *does* stand on its own.

EDDIE

Ah.

HOLLY

Why don't you just buy one of the paintings *un*-anonymously?

EDDIE

No, that wouldn't do. That would seem even more like pity, I believe. "Son, for your birthday, I will condescend to purchase one of your paintings." No, that---that wouldn't do at all.

HOLLY

I really don't think an anonymous purchase would be a good idea.

EDDIE

I will consider this. The old man will take this into consideration.

HOLLY

The old man is getting senile.

EDDIE

Perhaps I could buy dinner for the two of you, for his birthday.

HOLLY

Eddie---

EDDIE

That would be nice, wouldn't it? Dinner for two, you could talk, perhaps patch up that which was torn asunder.

HOLLY

Eddie. "Torn asunder?"

EDDIE

However it happened. (Beat.) How *did* it happen?

HOLLY

I guess we never really talked about it, did we?

EDDIE

We've given it a wide berth all this time.

HOLLY

It was. . . I guess it was a touchy subject.

EDDIE

A touchy subject, yes. A tender area. As if there were a sign: Keep Off the Grass.

HOLLY

Yeah, Keep Off the Grass. That's what it was like.

EDDIE

But the time has come, don't you think? To glance, at least, at the circumstances? Tell the old man.

HOLLY

Well. . .

EDDIE

Yes, my dear?

HOLLY

God, Eddie, I don't know. What the hell *did* happen? (Beat.) It was just, well, we were having problems, that's all. Things weren't going as smoothly as they should have, I guess. You remember, don't you? The way Art and I would argue all the time, about the stupidest things? About aesthetics, mostly, I swear it was mostly about aesthetics.

EDDIE

You argued about aesthetics?

HOLLY

Well, about *art*, mostly. *Art work*, I mean. About the impetus behind it, and the importance of an audience---or the lack of importance. Art was always way too concerned---I thought so, anyway---about how people would respond to his work. I mean, he couldn't just paint something, he had to take into account how it might affect somebody who saw it. Anybody who saw it.

EDDIE

This is not a valid concern?

HOLLY

Well. . .

EDDIE

If a painting is to be shown, my dear, don't you think the artist must consider how it will affect the viewer?

HOLLY

Now, see, that's just what we would argue about. Because I think an artist should just express whatever she wants to express. You know? And to hell with the audience. I mean, who are you doing art for? For yourself, or for a bunch of people that you don't even know?

EDDIE

Perhaps that's the crux of the matter right there. Perhaps it's the choice that's made that you don't agree with.

HOLLY

Well, no, Eddie, that's not exactly true. Because there are different ways to fulfill either of those choices. But I just felt, sometimes, that the way Art was using was---I don't know---it was like he was trying too hard to please other people instead of pleasing himself. That, for him, pleasing other people was the *point*. It's like he always needs people to be impressed by everything he does---it's one of his major issues, I swear.

EDDIE

And this displeases *you*.

HOLLY

Eddie.

EDDIE

You're involved in the arts yourself, my dear.

HOLLY

Well, I---

EDDIE

You've acted in a number of plays. And you've done an exemplary job on stage, Holly, particularly in that last drama you were part of. What was it? That thing about the---the headless king?

HOLLY

*Le Roi Decapite.*

EDDIE

Ah, yes: French. It would be French, wouldn't it? (Beat.) So---what has been your own choice, your own solution, then, vis-à-vis this problem you perceive?

HOLLY

Well, that's just it, Eddie---*that's* part of the problem, too. At least it was with Art and me. Because I'm not fully aware of my own relationship with the audience. I mean, I act because I want to act, certainly, and it's the process of learning the role, of submerging myself in some character, that I really enjoy. And sometimes, I swear, I think I'd be satisfied with tech rehearsals. You know---with no audience at all. Because the thought of an audience actually scares me, at that point. But then, when the play is up and there's a whole group of people watching me perform. . . God, Eddie, it's, it's electrifying! It's like somebody hooked me up to a generator, like my whole body is being flooded with energy. Because I'm *giving* them something. I'm giving them---at least, I'm *helping* to give them---the play. And they *know* it---they *know* I'm doing a good job. And I think, Christ, *this* is what I do all that work for, *this* is the feeling I wanted to get.

EDDIE

From pleasing the audience.

HOLLY

Not necessarily *pleasing* the audience, but. . .

EDDIE

Yes?

HOLLY

There are *differences*, Eddie. There are a *lot* of differences.

EDDIE

And it was among these differences that you and Arthur became lost?

HOLLY

It wasn't even our fault, Eddie. Not really. It was. . .it was just the way things were going. The way they *kept* going, for months. Around and around, like a circle, like the proverbial vicious circle. And then I met Sanford and it was like, I don't know. . . it was like a

HOLLY (Continued)

way out. (Beat.) I was pretty confused, I think. About how I thought people should be, about what I wanted from someone. About what love is.

EDDIE

Love can be difficult at times, my dear.

HOLLY

I know, Eddie.

EDDIE

At times love can be downright excruciating.

HOLLY

I know, I know.

EDDIE

But it's worth the effort---mark my words. The old man knows: *it's worth the effort.*

HOLLY

Yeah?

EDDIE

Up to a point, of course. I will grant you that. Once you pass a certain point, the only thing that's worthwhile is getting out with what remains of your sanity. (Beat.) But I believe that what you and Arthur had. . .I believe that what the two of you had required just a bit more effort to survive. And to flourish.

HOLLY

Yeah? I'd like to believe that, Eddie.

EDDIE

Sometimes belief is all it takes.

HOLLY

Eddie. Christ. That sounds like a Hallmark card.

EDDIE

If the shoe fits, my dear.

HOLLY

Better safe than sorry?

EDDIE

Precisely. Better safe than sorry.

HOLLY

Eddie. (She shakes her head.) Jesus, Eddie, I'm not. . . I'm not sure I even want to get involved in another relationship right now. You know? Even with Art. I think. . .it's time I had some time alone.

EDDIE

I can understand that, my dear. That makes perfect sense to the old man.

HOLLY

I just don't want to jump into anything right now.

EDDIE

Of course, of course. But perhaps, ah, perhaps it would help you and Arthur to talk. As friends, at the least. I believe it might help both of you.

HOLLY

You think?

EDDIE

He'll be here on his birthday.

HOLLY

On Wednesday?

EDDIE

After he is released from work, he'll come over to receive his gift from me.

HOLLY

Just like last year.

EDDIE

Yes. Precisely.

HOLLY

We had a great time, didn't we, Eddie? We had so much fun that night. . .

EDDIE

Yes. Yes, we did.

HOLLY

He wore that crazy hat.

EDDIE

Hat?

HOLLY

Yeah, that hat with the, the---whattaya call 'em? Deely bobbers? God, he was so funny that night!

EDDIE

Ah yes: the hat. The deely bobbers.

HOLLY

So he'll be here?

EDDIE

He'll be here around six o'clock. A little after, most likely. If you were to show up at---

HOLLY

Eddie.

EDDIE

If you were to show up at 6:30, my dear, I believe that would make for a pleasant gathering.

HOLLY

A pleasant gathering.

EDDIE

You can't deny that such an arrangement holds interest.

HOLLY

Well. . .

EDDIE

At the very least.

(Beat.)

HOLLY

I'll think about it, okay?

EDDIE

Thank you, my dear.

HOLLY

I'm not making any promises.

EDDIE

As you wish.

HOLLY  
(Wryly.)

I'll take it into consideration.

EDDIE

I'm sure your judgment is sound. (He smiles.) Holly knows best, eh?

HOLLY

Eddie. (She shakes her head.) You really *are* something else.

EDDIE

So I'm told, my dear. So the old man is told.

## Act II

(EDDIE is in his chair, flipping through the phonebook's Yellow Pages. He pauses, writes a number on the scratchpad atop his chair's arm; pauses, flips some more Pages, writes down a couple more numbers. He closes the phonebook, then, and sets it on the end table. He punches numbers on the keypad, speaks very clearly into the mouthpiece when the line is engaged.)

EDDIE

Yes, the Uptown Gallery?

The Uptown Gallery *downtown*?

Because one can never be too sure. That's right: never too sure.

Well. Yes. I believe you have an exhibit at this time.

Yes, "Art Stripped Naked."

Thank you, yes, I'm familiar with that information. I would like to know about the *painting* by that name as well.

Yes, "Art Stripped Naked."

Yes. Precisely. I need some information about that piece.

To begin with, the cost of the painting.

Ah. Very good. That's a typical price, is it?

Ah, of course. Yes, I see. The skill of rendering, the reputation of the artist. Or, yes, the lack thereof, I understand.

And the size of the painting?

No, I realize that it's large. I need the measurements, please, the precise dimensions of the piece. (He takes notes, now, as he talks.) Seventy-two by forty-eight. Forty-*eight*, you said? Seventy-two by forty-eight. Yes, that *is* large. And this is in *inches*, correct? Seventy-two by forty-eight inches? And that's *tall*, correct? Seventy-two by forty-eight *tall*? Yes, of course. And this is "Art Stripped Naked?"

Very good. Thank you.

As a matter of fact, yes, there is one more question: are the other paintings of dissimilar sizes?

Dissimilar *sizes*.

*Dissimilar*.

Young man. *Are the other paintings the same size?*

Ah, very good. Scarcely a divergence among them.

No, that will suffice.

No, no, that will do.

EDDIE (Continued)

Yes, that is an elegant sufficiency, thank you.

Well, thank *you*, young man. Thank you very much. Good day.

(EDDIE hangs up the phone, checks his notes, and looks offstage for a moment, thinking. He checks the numbers he'd written earlier & nods, smiling to himself. He picks up the phone and begins to punch numbers again.)

## ( I N T E R M I S S I O N )

### Act III

#### Scene 1

DENNIS

(As he's lightly rapping at the door.)

Knock, knock!

EDDIE

Come in!

DENNIS

(Opens the door slowly and looks in.)

Delivery for Edward Chalmers.

EDDIE

That would be me, young man.

DENNIS

(Nods and goes back outside. He quickly returns to the threshold, carrying a rather thin but large---okay, 72 x 48---package wrapped in brown paper. He enters and pauses, watching Eddie watch him.)

Mr. Chalmers?

EDDIE

Yes?

DENNIS

Where should I put this?

EDDIE

Ah. Over by the closet, I believe.

DENNIS

Yes sir?

EDDIE

(He rises from his chair.)

Right this way, young man.

(He guides DENNIS to the closet door.)

Yes, that will be fine. Right there against the wall. Yes, that's fine, right there. Very good. Thank you.

DENNIS

My pleasure, sir.

(He takes a small pad of receipts from a chest pocket, a pen from behind his ear.)

If you'd just sign right here. . .

EDDIE

(Signs with a flourish, steps back.)

There you go, young man. That should John the old Hancock! (He smiles.) Thank you.

DENNIS

Thank you, sir.

(DENNIS turns to leave.)

EDDIE

Young man?

DENNIS

Yes sir?

EDDIE

Would you tell me your name?

DENNIS

It's Dennis, sir.

EDDIE

Dennis. Dennis, I'm Eddie.

(He moves toward DENNIS, hand extended.)

DENNIS

(Shaking EDDIE's hand.)

Nice to meet you, sir.

EDDIE

Dennis.

Sir? DENNIS

Do you mind if I ask you a question? EDDIE

A question? DENNIS

Just a little one. EDDIE

Uh---no, I don't mind. Go right ahead. DENNIS

Are you involved in the arts? EDDIE

The arts? DENNIS

That is to say---are you an artist? EDDIE

I'm a delivery guy. DENNIS

Well, yes---of course you are. But in your spare time, I mean. Outside the confines of your, what do you call it, your situation. EDDIE

My dayjob? DENNIS

Precisely. Outside your dayjob. EDDIE

Well, uh, not really, sir. I, uh, I help my friend Karl sometimes, if that's what you mean. DENNIS

Your friend Karl? EDDIE

DENNIS

He does metal sculpture, you know? Tables and things? Bedframes, bookcases---stuff like that. He does other things, too. Figurative stuff, like really beautiful pieces. But the furniture kind of pays the bills, you know? And it's better than most of the stuff you see in stores these days.

EDDIE

And you help him design these items, this furniture?

DENNIS

Well, no. . . not really. Mostly, I help with the welding. It's, yeah, it's mostly the welding. You know? I mean, I have ideas of my own, of course. But Karl is, well, he's got the talent, he's the talented one, really. I mean, sometimes I might suggest to him, like, 'Wouldn't it be better if that crosspiece was over *here* instead of over *there*?' You know---like that. But mostly it's just the welding---which I like.

EDDIE

The welding.

DENNIS

Yes sir.

EDDIE

And what do you think of art?

DENNIS

What do I---like, in general?

EDDIE  
(He nods.)

In general.

DENNIS

Well, I don't really have any kind of. . . scholarly opinion or anything.

EDDIE

That's quite alright, young man. In fact, that's right on the mark. I would like to hear what you, personally, think about it---about art. If you don't mind?

DENNIS

Well, actually, Mr. Chalmers---

EDDIE

Please, call me Eddie.

DENNIS

Actually, Eddie, I *do* mind. No offense intended.

EDDIE

No offense taken, Dennis. But---hmmm---would you mind, then, telling me *why* you mind?

DENNIS

Well. Huh. (Beat.) I'm not really sure how to put it. (Beat.) It's like. . . well, there's a lot of people saying a lot of things about a lot of stuff that they don't know anything about. You know? And I prefer to not be one of those people, is all. Not that there's anything particularly wrong with doing that, okay? It's like---do you mind me telling you this, sir? I'm just kind of babbling, here.

EDDIE

This is precisely what I wish to hear, young man. Please---proceed.

DENNIS

Well. . . like Karl, for instance, okay? I mean, Karl can go on and on to someone about some book or some movie or whatever, and whoever's listening will think he's really up on the whole thing, right? Which is what he wants them to think, of course. But a lot of the time he hasn't even *read* the book or *seen* the movie, or whatever. A lot of the time he's just read the *reviews* of the thing, or heard other people talk about it or something. And yet he keeps trying to come off as Mr. Expert Man. And people buy right into it, too. And it gets to be pretty annoying after a while, too, y'know? It gets to be annoying to *me*, anyway, because I *know* what he's doing, I can *tell* when he's faking it. And it's not like it's any big moral failing or anything, okay? It's not like saying "Okay, I think I'll be a serial killer for a few years, what the heck." But I mean, what does he get out of faking it like that? Not even the recognition of his knowledge, really, because there *is* no knowledge to be recognized for. All he gets is, he fools some people into thinking that he knows about a lot of things that he's really pretty ignorant about.

EDDIE

The *illusion* of knowledge.

DENNIS

Exactly! It's just the *illusion* of knowledge. And most of the time, he feels pretty bad about it *himself*, afterward. That's what he tells me, anyway---that he hates when he does it. But he can't always stop himself, you know? It's, it's like---it's like he's *addicted* or something. And, God, *I* hate it, too! Sometimes I really fucking---excuse me---sometimes I really hate it. (Beat.) Because a lot of the time it gets in the way of what's really good about Karl, you know? That's what *I* think, anyway.

EDDIE

It sounds as if you've given this matter a great *deal* of thought.

DENNIS

Well, sometimes---you know?---sometimes I think I think *too* much.

EDDIE

Well, yes, certainly. I can see where that would obtain, yes. (Beat.) Would it be too much, though, considering that, to allow me to pose another question?

DENNIS

Another question?

EDDIE

Just one more question. Would that be alright?

DENNIS

Shoot.

EDDIE

What do you think it means: "Art Stripped Naked?"

DENNIS

Art stripped naked?

EDDIE

"Art Stripped Naked." Yes. What does that suggest to you, as a concept?

DENNIS

Well. Huh. Art stripped naked. (Beat.) I guess, if it's going to strip naked. . .it must be all dressed up, first. Right?

EDDIE

That's excellent reasoning, young man.

DENNIS

And if it takes all its clothes off. . .well, I guess if art's not all dressed up anymore, it's, uh. . . it's *life*.

EDDIE

It's *life*?

DENNIS

Yeah---it's life. I mean, that makes sense---doesn't it?

EDDIE

Certainly it makes sense, Dennis. It makes a great deal of sense. Which leads me, in fact, to a further point of inquiry. If you don't mind?

(DENNIS shrugs.)

EDDIE

How does one best capture life? How best to render it, in the interests of art, without losing its, well, its inherent value *as* life. Without, to follow your analogy, dressing it up too much?

DENNIS

Well, I think. . .

EDDIE

Yes?

DENNIS

I think a mixture would be best.

EDDIE

A mixture?

DENNIS

Well, it depends, of course. On what you're trying to say, I mean. *What* you want to show people affects *how* you try to show it, right? I mean, that's just what *I* think. But, most of the time, yeah---I think a mixture works best. A mixture---like those bowls of peanuts and pretzels at a party.

EDDIE

Peanuts and pretzels?

DENNIS

Yes. Because you might as well use what's available, right? The conventions, I mean. Because you can't pretend, if you do a painting, that it isn't a painting. You can't pretend, if you do a play, that it isn't a play. You can't do a movie and pretend it isn't a movie. That it isn't *fictional*, I mean---as opposed to a documentary. Well, I mean, I guess you *can*, like the Blair Witch or whatever---but then you get to some area where the blurring of the lines between what's actual and what's not. . . well, you get to an area where the blurring becomes the *point*. You know? Which is fine, I guess, if that's your goal. Like, subversion of expectations or something. Which can be really effective, sure. I mean, I *know* that, okay? Because something like that, that causes uncertainty, that undermines the conventions. . . something like that can let you drive a message into places where another method might not get you. (Beat.) But some people just don't like being invaded like that, you know? Some people prefer to keep their experience of art totally separate. Kind of like they're going to an art *zoo*.

EDDIE

An art *zoo*?

DENNIS

Yeah, because some people don't need any more uncertainty in their lives, you know? Some people feel undermined enough already, just by reality. Maybe, for them, art's an escape, or it's a reinforcement---of safety or something. Maybe--- (He stops abruptly.)

Yes?  
 EDDIE

Nothing.  
 DENNIS

Nothing?  
 EDDIE

I don't feel like talking about it anymore.  
 DENNIS

No? But surely, Dennis. Surely you have more to say.  
 EDDIE

Yeah, right. Maybe I do.  
 DENNIS

(Beat.)  
 EDDIE

But...?  
 DENNIS

But?  
 EDDIE

Yes, young man: but. I sense an unspoken "but." The implication of clarifying addenda.  
 DENNIS  
 (He's getting irritated, now.)  
 But *why* do you want to hear it, Eddie? That's the "but." That's what I ask myself, that's what *I'd* like to know.

Yes?  
 EDDIE

Why, Eddie? That's the basic question here, okay? *Why* do you give a shit?  
 DENNIS

Well, Dennis. Well. I "give a shit" because---  
 EDDIE

Because you have your *own* ideas about it, don't you?  
 DENNIS

EDDIE

(wondering Where The Hell Is This Coming From?)

Young man. I'm not sure I---

DENNIS

(A nerve has been struck. He's moving into over-reaction, here.)

Because you're just checking to see how off-base everyone else is, aren't you? To make yourself feel good, right? You're just trying to pump yourself up by squashing somebody else down. (Beat.) That's what this whole thing is about, isn't it?

EDDIE

(Almost able to respond.)

DENNIS

So you're gonna ask a delivery guy, right?

EDDIE

Dennis.

DENNIS

A fucking delivery guy, *sure*, some lousy working-class piece of shit---totally without value, what difference does *he* make in the world---right?

EDDIE

Dennis---

DENNIS

What?

EDDIE

Young man. You don't have to be so defensive, here.

DENNIS

(is about to lose his shit, oh yeah.)

Yeah? You just hold on a minute, old man. *Don't* you. . . *tell* me. . . how *defensive* I have to be. You got that? You don't know me. You have no idea.

EDDIE

Dennis. Hold on, now. All I mean, is---

DENNIS

All you mean is---what? That you're *better* than I am? Because you know so much about art?

EDDIE

Young man, I don't---

DENNIS

Because you *have* to know, just to be able to ask those questions. (Beat.) Don't think I don't know that, okay? Don't think I'm some kind of retard.

EDDIE

Dennis. If you'll just---

DENNIS

And I'm sure you know a whole *bunch*, alright? I'll bet you *are* an artist, aren't you? Probably make a living at it, too, probably on the covers of magazines, people all over the world know what you do, *all* that shit---right?

EDDIE

Young man---

DENNIS

*Listen*, okay?

EDDIE

Dennis.

DENNIS

Just fucking *listen* to me, okay?

EDDIE

Yes, okay. I'm listening to you, Dennis.

DENNIS

*I just need somebody to listen to me!*

EDDIE

I'm here, Dennis. I'm listening.

(Beat.)

DENNIS

That's the main thing of what I can't stand about Karl, okay? It's not that he's always *pretending* he knows a bunch of shit, alright? It's that he *does* know a bunch of shit---about a *lot* of things. About a lot more things than *I'll* ever know. (Beat.) And it's like he's always throwing it in my face, too, I swear to God. Not that he *means* it that way, he probably doesn't *mean* it that way at all. But that's just how it *feels* sometimes, okay? Like, I can't talk about *anything* that he doesn't already know more about than I do. Not a fucking *thing*. Because he's

older than I am, and he's been to college, too, he has a fucking degree to back up whatever he's talking about. "I know what I'm talking about, Dennis---I had a *class* on it." (Beat.) Motherfucker! (Beat.) And he's doing his *artwork*, okay? He's making a *living* at it. A fucking *living*, okay? With his *art*. *He* doesn't have a dayjob. *He* doesn't have to schlep shit all over the city whenever the boss snaps his fingers. (Beat.) And, y'know, whenever we go somewhere, no matter where we go? It's always like everybody fucking knows him, everybody fucking *loves* him. They're always like, "Hey, Karl, whatcha working on?" "Gosh, Karl, that last piece you did was reeeally wonderful!" "Gee, Karl, you're just hot shit on a silver platter!" And I'm standing there like I'm the fucking invisible man or something, you know? Like, who the fuck is *this* guy, some parasite that Karl picked up in the fucking Amazon? It's like I don't even *exist*! Like I don't fucking matter at *all*!

EDDIE

Dennis.

DENNIS

To *anyone*!

EDDIE

Dennis.

DENNIS

It drives me *crazy*, you know? Sometimes I feel like I'm gonna lose my fucking mind.

EDDIE

*Dennis*.

DENNIS

I'm fucking *serious*. I just don't---

EDDIE

Dennis!

DENNIS

(Finally snapping out of it.)

What?

EDDIE

Karl who?

DENNIS

What?

EDDIE

I don't know this Karl that you speak of, okay? I have no cognizance regarding this person at all. This person means nothing to me. Do you understand? Perhaps if I were an artist, or if I

were much younger, perhaps then I would be more aware of the local . . . environment? Is that the word? Creative environment?

DENNIS

Uh, it's. . . I think it's "scene."

EDDIE

Scene? Yes, that's it: the local creative *scene*. (Beat.) But I'm *not* an artist---I'm not an artist at all. I'm a mechanic, Dennis, a simple mechanic. I am, in fact, a *retired* mechanic. And even if I were an artist, I can assure you that, at this moment, this friend you speak of, this---what was his name again?

DENNIS

Karl?

EDDIE

Yes, that's the one: Karl. For whom, I can assure you, I would not at this moment give a rat's ass. Not the smallest ass of the smallest rat would I give, do you hear me? I'm here with *you*, Dennis. You have done me a great courtesy: in talking with me, and in sharing your personal experience so eloquently. It speaks well to me, in fact, that one so young can be so expressive, and with such honesty, in the face of these powerful emotions. You are to be commended for that alone. (Beat.) Do you understand me? (Beat.) And, as much as it may not please you to know, you have been the most polite delivery person I have ever had the pleasure of doing business with. You may dismiss that if you wish; but, especially considering the condition of the service industry in these benighted times, that is nothing to be sneezed at.

(DENNIS assimilates this new information.)

EDDIE

Do you understand me?

DENNIS

I---Mr. Chalmers?

EDDIE

Eddie.

DENNIS

Eddie. (Beat.) I'm sorry. Okay? I'm sorry, Eddie.

EDDIE

Dennis, there's no need to apologize.

DENNIS

I'm really sorry, Eddie. I---

EDDIE

You're doing perfectly well here, young man. Also, I want you to be aware of something else. I want you to know that my door is always open to you, if you ever need to talk to someone. Whenever you're feeling generous, that is to say: do the lonely old man a favor, drop in to talk whenever you feel the urge. (Beat.) Alright? Do you understand me?

DENNIS

I . . .uh, *thank* you, Eddie. *I will.*

(DENNIS looks gratefully into EDDIE's eyes.)

Thank you.

EDDIE

I'd continue to enjoy your company right now, in fact, if I didn't suspect that you have more pressing business elsewhere.

DENNIS

What? (He checks his watch.) Oh God, I'm *way* behind schedule! I---Christ!---shit!---I gotta go! (Exiting.) *Thank* you, Eddie! Thank you so much! I---I'll see you soon!

EDDIE

(Almost to himself, after DENNIS is gone.)

Fare thee well, young man.

(EDDIE goes to the big package and begins stowing it in the closet.)

## Scene 2

ARTHUR

(Knocking at the front door.)

EDDIE

Come in, come in.

ARTHUR

(He enters and walks over to EDDIE. ARTHUR is not happy.)

Dad.

EDDIE

Happy Birthday, son.

ARTHUR

You have something you want to tell me, Dad?

EDDIE

Something to tell you? I've just told you: Happy Birthday.

ARTHUR

Anything else, Dad? Is there anything else you want to tell me?

EDDIE

The son toys with the father, is that it? This is a sort of birthday game.

ARTHUR

I'm not playing around, Dad.

EDDIE

No, actually. . . I wouldn't think you are. Your demeanor speaks to me of a certain gravity, son. Your countenance indicates a distinct lack of mirth at this point. And yet, there is something that I'm supposed to tell you, is that right?

ARTHUR

Yeah, Dad. Yeah---I think there is.

EDDIE

But it's not Happy Birthday. I've already told you Happy Birthday.

ARTHUR

Right.

EDDIE

And have gotten no thanks for it, I might add.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

How sharper than a serpent's tooth, I might add.

ARTHUR

(Tightly.)

Okay, Dad. Alright. Thank you. Thank you for the birthdays.

EDDIE

You're welcome, son. Always a pleasure. (Beat.) Here---why don't you have a seat?

ARTHUR

(remains standing.)

Somebody bought my painting, Dad.

EDDIE

Yes?

ARTHUR

Somebody bought “Art Stripped Naked.”

EDDIE

Did they? Well, that’s wonderful! That’s absolutely wonderful. I believe congratulations are in order.

ARTHUR

Jeremy called me at work to tell me. (Beat.) I really didn’t need to hear about it at work.

EDDIE

You don’t seem happy, son. You seem less than pleased with this fortuitous turn of events.

ARTHUR

I’m wondering who it was.

EDDIE

Who it was?

ARTHUR

Who bought “Art Stripped Naked.”

EDDIE

You don’t---

ARTHUR

I’m not supposed to know. Jeremy said that it was one of the conditions of the sale, that no one could know who purchased the piece.

EDDIE

You’re kidding the old man, is that right? You’re pulling his leg?

ARTHUR

I’m not pulling anybody’s leg.

EDDIE

Someone bought “Art Stripped Naked?” Someone bought it *anonymously*? Is that what you’re telling me?

ARTHUR

That’s what I’m telling you.

(EDDIE begins chuckling, turns quickly to outright laughter.)

ARTHUR

What's so funny?

EDDIE

(As he struggles to control his reaction.)

That's amazing, son! That's truly amazing! My God, this is one for the record books!

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

What are the odds? Good Lord, they must be astronomical!

ARTHUR

Dad. Listen to me.

(Beat.)

ARTHUR

Dad!

EDDIE

Yes?

ARTHUR

*You* didn't buy the painting, did you?

EDDIE

(Sobering quickly.)

Arthur. You are asking me if *I* purchased your painting?

ARTHUR

That's what I'm asking you, yes.

EDDIE

You're asking the old man, did *he* purchase "Art Stripped Naked" anonymously?

ARTHUR

Yes, I am.

EDDIE

Have you spoken to Holly recently?

ARTHUR

When would I speak to Holly?

EDDIE

Ah. Well, then. (Beat.) Someone actually purchased the painting anonymously?

ARTHUR

That's right.

EDDIE

"Art Stripped Naked?"

ARTHUR

"Art Stripped Naked."

EDDIE

(Shaking his head.)

This is truly remarkable. . .

ARTHUR

At first I thought it was that artist from San Diego. You know, the one who had to cancel his show? But Jeremy said it definitely wasn't him. He said that sometimes things like this happen, that it's very rare, but---for a bunch of different reasons---sometimes people request anonymity. And I, uh, I didn't believe him. I thought it was you.

EDDIE

I?

ARTHUR

Yeah.

EDDIE

Your *father*?

ARTHUR

That's right.

EDDIE

You thought that *I* had bought your painting? *Anonymously*?

ARTHUR

Yeah---that's what I thought.

EDDIE

What kind of father would do a thing like that, do you think? What kind of father would undermine his son's talent in that manner?

ARTHUR

I don't know, Dad. I figured, maybe you thought you were doing me a favor. Like, maybe for my birthday.

EDDIE

Son. That would be no favor to you.

ARTHUR

I don't think it would be, either.

EDDIE

Then you have nothing to worry about.

ARTHUR

You didn't buy it?

(Beat.)

EDDIE

I didn't buy it.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

The old man does not lie to his son.

ARTHUR

Then who bought it?

EDDIE

Whoever it was that wished to remain anonymous, obviously. One needn't be Sherlock Holmes to indulge in such tautology, Arthur. This is undoubtedly a rare occurrence, as your Mr. Upton says, but it *can* happen. (Beat.) Perhaps your father was *considering* doing such a thing, you see, but he decided against it. He decided against it, but someone else---someone completely unrelated to the situation---perpetrated the very transaction. Think of that, son! Consider the improbability of such a coincidence!

ARTHUR

Dad, what are you talking about?

EDDIE

A coincidence like that is astonishing, son. Can you imagine? The senses reel. The mind boggles.

ARTHUR

Maybe it was Holly.

EDDIE

Holly?

ARTHUR

Because she felt guilty or something. (Beat.) Did she talk to you about the painting? During her last, uh, visit?

EDDIE

I don't think it was Holly.

ARTHUR

No?

EDDIE

I truly doubt that it was Holly who bought the painting. There are many things of which I am less certain.

ARTHUR

Yeah? How do you know?

EDDIE

Well, because I *was* considering just such an anonymous purchase myself, son. I admit this to you now, Arthur. I admit this to you freely: the old man was *considering* it.

ARTHUR

Dad! Jesus Christ! How could you---

EDDIE

But only briefly! Only *briefly*, son. Do you understand? Merely tossing the idea out for comment, nothing more than that. And Holly was adamant that it wouldn't be a good idea. It would be a very *bad* idea, she said. It would be the worst thing one could do.

ARTHUR

Yeah?

EDDIE

That Holly's a smart one, my boy. She's a very thoughtful young woman.

ARTHUR

I know, Dad.

EDDIE

And she's attractive, too, isn't she? She's certainly easy on the eyes. She's. . .what is it? Half of three foxes?

ARTHUR

Half. . .*what?*

EDDIE

Half of three foxes.

ARTHUR

Half. . .? Oh. You mean. . .a fox and a half?

EDDIE

Yes, that's it: she's a fox and a half, isn't she?

ARTHUR

Yes, Dad, she's a fox and a half. (Beat.) But if *she* didn't buy the painting, then---

EDDIE

It's time for your present, isn't it, son? I really think it's time for your present.

ARTHUR

I'd really like to know what's going on with my painting.

EDDIE

Life goes on, son.

ARTHUR

Right.

EDDIE

Some mysteries are meant to remain unsolved.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

Arthur. Forget the painting for a moment. Be here now, as the hippies used to say. Do you understand? Do you understand what your father is telling you? Forget the past. It's your birthday. There's no time like the present---and *this* is the time for *your* present. Do you see? Does the old man make himself clear?

ARTHUR

(Giving EDDIE a Look.)

*Dad.*

EDDIE

(Giving ARTHUR the same Look.)

*Son.*

(Beat.)

ARTHUR

(Finally half-smiling, trying to allow his concern to erode.)

Okay. . . okay, yeah, I guess. . . I'm sorry---you're right. I don't really need to obsess about it, do I? (Beat.) You're always so good about remembering my birthday, Dad. Year after year, sweater after sweater, and you haven't missed it once.

EDDIE

You have yet to forget mine, son.

ARTHUR

Yeah, well.

EDDIE

But the old man is in his dotage, is that it? The old man is reeling in the wild grip of Alzheimer's and is to be commended for remembering his own son's birthday---is that the point?

ARTHUR

Dad. Jesus Christ.

EDDIE

(Smiling.)

Here, you have a seat. Just a moment and I'll get your present.

(After ARTHUR sits, EDDIE goes to the closet, wrestles out the brown-wrapped package, and brings it to the chair.)

EDDIE

Happy Birthday, Arthur.

ARTHUR

(He stands, frowning.)

Dad. What the hell is this?

EDDIE

This is your present.

ARTHUR

Dad, what---

EDDIE

Open it, for God's sake, son! The old man can't stand here all night.

(ARTHUR takes hold of the package, starts slowly peeling the wrapping down & away from the top as EDDIE talks.)

EDDIE

I thought it would be a good idea to get you something other than a sweater this year. Not that the sweaters I've given you previously were anything less than the best sweaters available, of course. Not in the least. But I imagine they tend to pile up, year after year. Many fathers, I understand, must suffer the monotony of the annual birthday necktie, but you've always been much more creative with your gift-giving. (Beat.) So the time had arrived, I decided, for a more equitable exchange. (Beat.) And I'm proud of your accomplishments, son: with all that you've done in your work. And I thought. . .well, I thought that this would best express how I feel.

ARTHUR

Dad. This is. . .this is just. . .

(Words fail ARTHUR as he stares in disbelief at the  
Blank Canvas that was beneath the wrapping.)

EDDIE

There are some brushes, too---in the bottom, there. Camel's hair, I believe the man said. Winsor & Newton, an assurance of quality.

ARTHUR

Dad. (Beat.) God, Dad, I'm blown away. I'm totally blown away.

EDDIE

This meets with your approval, then?

ARTHUR

Dad, Christ, it's perfect.

(He reaches over with one arm and hugs EDDIE.)

You're the best, you know that? Goddamnit, Dad. You're the absolute, fucking best.

EDDIE

(Kind of, tentatively, hugging back.)

Thank you, son. Thank you.

(There is a knock at the door.)

EDDIE

Ah.

ARTHUR

"Ah?" What do you mean, "Ah?" Are you expecting somebody?

EDDIE

Perhaps.

ARTHUR

Dad, look---I'm sorry, but I'm not in the mood for a party or anything right now.

EDDIE

Perhaps the old man arranged something.

ARTHUR

You---what? *What* did you arrange?

EDDIE

Or perhaps it's mere coincidence.

ARTHUR

Dad.

EDDIE

Perhaps there are *coincidences*, and then there are *arrangements*---don't you think? Life is like that, Arthur: like a sort of mixture. Like those bowls of peanuts and pretzels at a party. Do you follow me? A sort of. . .blank canvas, you might say, that one may fill with---

ARTHUR

Dad, what the hell are you---

(The knock comes again, this time more fiercely.)

EDDIE

Come in, come in!

(HOLLY enters slowly, smiling tentatively. She closes the door behind her and stands very near it. Is she wearing a hat with deely bobbars?)

HOLLY  
(to ARTHUR)

Hi.

ARTHUR

Hi.

EDDIE

Hello, my dear.

HOLLY

Hi, Eddie.

(Beat. Beat. Beat. As ARTHUR and HOLLY look at each other.)

Maybe the lights fade briefly, as if the play were over, before returning to full brightness.)

EDDIE

Well. I believe it's time for the old man to take a walk.

(He goes to the closet and gets his coat.)

I believe it's time for my evening constitutional.

ARTHUR

Dad. You don't have to leave right now.

HOLLY

Eddie. We don't need any. . .privacy.

(to ARTHUR)

Do we?

ARTHUR

Well, no, of course not. Dad, you really don't have---

EDDIE

(As he's buttoning the coat and heading for the door)

Cabin fever, children. About to drive the old man around the bend. Another minute here and I'll blockade myself inside the bathroom. I can picture it now: numerous semi-automatic weapons, ultimatums shouted out the window. (Beat.) Imagine the violence, the senseless tragedy. (Beat.) Oh the humanity. (Beat.) Shame upon the house of the old man. (Beat.) Much better, you see. Much better to avoid the bloodbath, the stench of rotting corpses that not even a thorough steam-cleaning could remove from the patterns of the faded carpet.

(He puts his hat on, moves toward the door, says to HOLLY)

Pardon me, my dear.

(HOLLY moves around EDDIE & further into the room  
---closer to ARTHUR---to allow EDDIE passage.)

EDDIE

(pausing to tip his hat curtly to the kids)

Good day!

(EDDIE exits.)

(ARTHUR stands silently, holding onto the  
Blank Canvas, looking at HOLLY.)

(HOLLY stands silently, looking at ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR

Uh. . . Hi.

(Beat.)

HOLLY

Hi.

(Beat.)

(Lights fade to black.)

**The End**