

*Rothko stands, staring forward. He is looking directly at the audience. (He is actually studying one of his Seagram Mural paintings, which hangs before him.) Pause. Rothko lights a cigarette. He wears thick glasses and old, ill-fitting clothes spattered with specks of glue and paint. Contemplative classical music is playing on a phonograph. (Rothko favored Mozart and Schubert.) Rothko takes a drag on his cigarette. Pause. There is the sound of a door opening and closing from the unseen entry vestibule offstage. Ken, a man in his early twenties, enters nervously. He wears a suit and tie. This is the first time he has been in the studio. He looks around. He is about to speak. Rothko gestures for him not to speak. Then he beckons for Ken to join him. Ken goes to Rothko, stands next to him. Rothko indicates the central painting; the audience.*

ROTHKO. What do you see? (*Ken is about to respond —*) Wait. Stand closer. You've got to get close. Let it pulsate. Let it work on you. Closer. Too close. There. Let it spread out. Let it wrap its arms around you; let it *embrace* you, filling even your peripheral vision so nothing else exists or has ever existed or will ever exist. Let the picture do its work — but work with it. Meet it halfway for God's sake! Lean forward, lean into it. Engage with it! ... Now, what do you see? — Wait, wait, wait! (*He hurries and lowers the lighting a bit, then returns to Ken.*) So, now, what do you see? — Be specific. No, be exact. Be exact — but sensitive. You understand? Be kind. Be a human being, that's all I can say. Be a *human being* for once in your life! These pictures deserve compassion and they live or die in the eye of the sensitive viewer, they quicken only if the empa-

thetic viewer will let them. That is what they cry out for. That is why they were created. That is what they deserve ... Now ... What do you see? (*Beat.*)

KEN. Red.

ROTHKO. But do you *like* it?

KEN. Mm.

ROTHKO. Speak up.

KEN. Yes.

ROTHKO. Of course you *like* it — how can you not *like* it?! Everyone likes everything nowadays. They like the television and the phonograph and the soda pop and the shampoo and the Cracker Jack. Everything becomes everything else and it's all nice and pretty and *likable*. Everything is fun in the sun! Where's the discernment? Where's the arbitration that separates what I *like* from what I *respect*, what I deem *worthy*, what has ... listen to me now ... *significance*. (*Rothko moves and turns up the lights again, although he keeps them relatively low, and then switches off the record player, as he continues.*) Maybe this is a dinosaur talking. Maybe I'm a dinosaur sucking up the oxygen from you cunning little mammals hiding in the bushes waiting to take over. Maybe I'm speaking a lost language unknown to your generation. But a generation that does not aspire to seriousness, to meaning, is unworthy to walk in the shadow of those who have gone before, I mean those who have struggled and surmounted, I mean those who have aspired, I mean Rembrandt, I mean Turner, I mean Michelangelo and Matisse ... I mean obviously Rothko. (*He stares at Ken, challenging.*) Do you aspire?

KEN. Yes.

ROTHKO. To what? To what do you aspire?

KEN. I want to be a painter so I guess I aspire to ... painting.

ROTHKO. Then those clothes won't do. We work here. Hang up your jacket outside. I appreciate you put on your Sunday clothes to impress me, it's poignant really, touches me, but it's ridiculous. We work hard here; this isn't a goddamn Old World salon with tea cakes and lemonade. Go hang up your jacket outside. (*Ken exits to the entry vestibule offstage. He returns without his jacket. Takes off his tie and rolls up his sleeves.*) Sidney told you what I need here?

KEN. Yes. (*Rothko busies himself, sorting brushes, arranging canvases, etc, as:*)

ROTHKO. We start every morning at nine and work until five. Just like bankers. You'll help me stretch the canvases and mix the paints