

*Just his eyes move craftily over the canvas. Paint drips. Ken is breathless. Rothko is coiled. He tilts his head, studying, adjudicating. He considers the color of the paint in the bucket. Needs something.) Gimme black number four and the first maroon. (Ken brings some powdered pigments in old jars. Rothko instructs, still barely moving. His eyes dart from the bucket of paint to the canvas.) A pinch of black. (Ken adds a bit of black pigment, stirs it carefully.) Just that amount again. (Ken adds a bit more, keeps stirring.) Twice as much maroon. (Ken adds some maroon pigment, keeps stirring. Rothko is unsure. He looks at the painting. The moment is passing. He is getting desperate. To himself, frustrated.) Come on ... come on ... come on ... What does it need?*

KEN. Red.

ROTHKO. I wasn't talking to you! *(Beat. Tragically, the moment has passed for Rothko. He flings the paintbrush away. It splatters. He spins on Ken.)* DON'T YOU EVER DO THAT AGAIN! *(He rages, stomping restlessly around the room.)* By what right do you speak?! By what right do you express an opinion on my work? Who the fuck are you? What have you done? What have you seen? Where have you earned the right to exist here with me and these things you don't understand?! "RED"?! You want to paint the thing?! Go ahead — here's red — ! *(He clumsily slings packets of various red paints at Ken.)* And red! And red! And red! — I don't even know what that means! What does "red" mean to me? You mean scarlet? You mean crimson? You mean plum-mulberry-magenta-burgundy-salmon-carmine-carnelian-coral? Anything but "red"! What is "RED"?! *(Rothko stands, getting his breath, collecting himself. Beat. Ken picks up the packets of paint from the floor. Rothko prowls, discontent. Pause.)*

KEN. I meant sunrise.

ROTHKO. Sunrise?

KEN. I meant the red at sunrise ... The feeling of it.

ROTHKO. *(Derisive.)* Oh, the "feeling of it." *(Beat. Ken continues to clean up, clearing away the bucket of paint and brush. Beat.)* What do you mean the feeling of it?

KEN. I didn't mean red paint only. I meant the *emotion* of red at sunrise.

ROTHKO. Sunrise isn't red.

KEN. Yes it is.

ROTHKO. I'm telling you it's not.

KEN. Sunrise is red and red is sunrise. (*Ken keeps cleaning up.*) Red is heartbeat. Red is passion. Red wine. Red roses. Red lipstick. Beets. Tulips. Peppers.

ROTHKO. Arterial blood.

KEN. That too. (*Rothko thinks about it.*)

ROTHKO. Rust on the bike on the lawn.

KEN. And apples ... And tomatoes.

ROTHKO. Dresden firestorm at night. The sun in Rousseau, the flag in Delacroix, the robe in El Greco.

KEN. A rabbit's nose. An albino's eyes. A parakeet.

ROTHKO. Florentine marble. Atomic flash. Nick yourself shaving, blood in the Barbazol.

KEN. The ruby slippers. Technicolor. That phone to the Kremlin on the president's desk.

ROTHKO. Russian flag, Nazi flag, Chinese flag.

KEN. Persimmons. Pomegranates. Redlight district. Red tape. Rouge.

ROTHKO. Lava. Lobsters. Scorpions.

KEN. Stop sign. Sports car. A blush.

ROTHKO. Viscera. Flame. Dead Fauvists.

KEN. Traffic lights. Titian hair.

ROTHKO. Slash your wrists. Blood in the sink.

KEN. Santa Claus.

ROTHKO. Satan. (*Beat.*) So ... red.

KEN. Exactly. (*Rothko gazes thoughtfully at his painting.*)