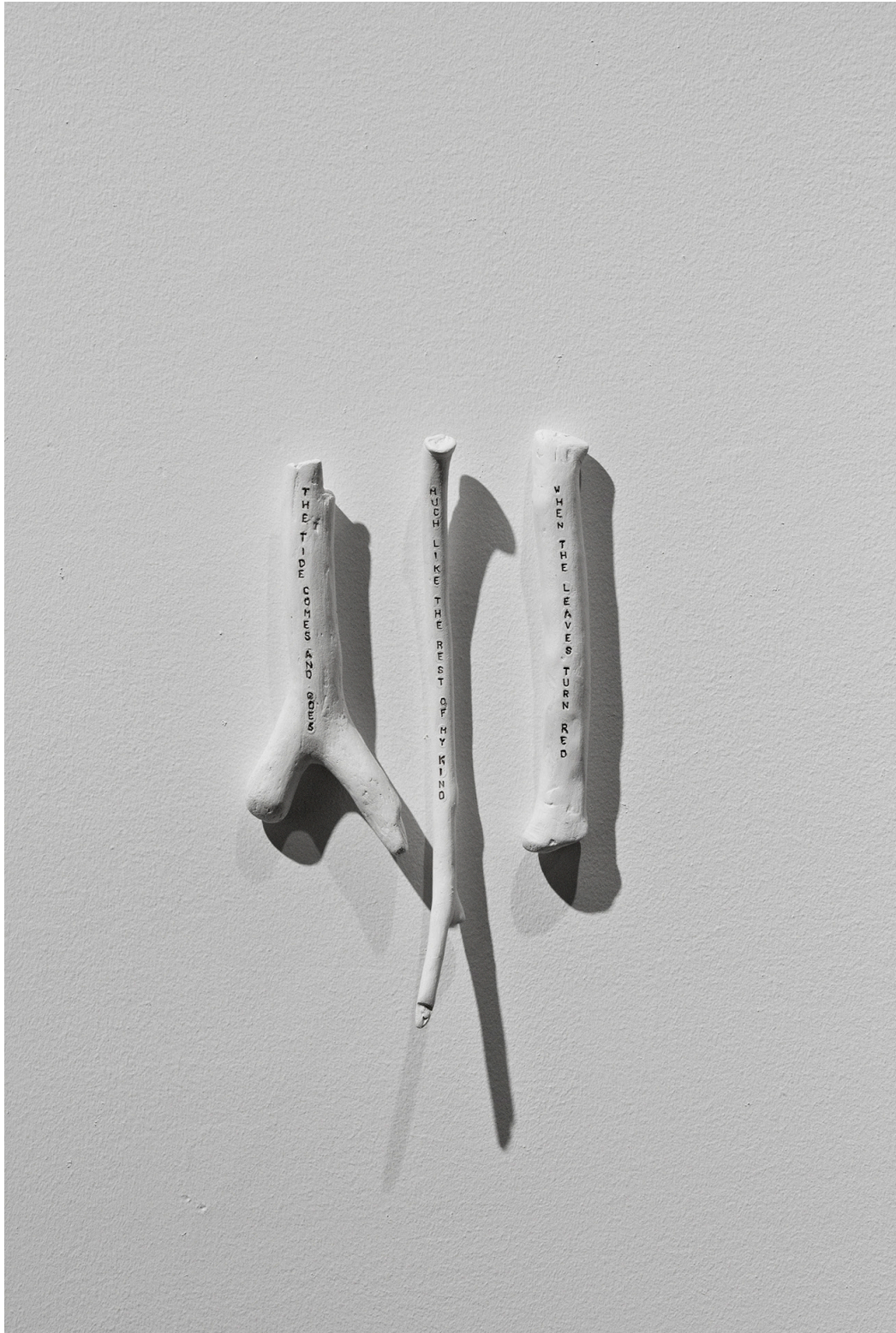


TIMBER

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DOLL FACTORY

Monologue

To Bernard-Marie Koltès

“Stop putting more red over and over again. When the men are already in the streets chasing the women. When the women are already walking with their faces on. The men stare at them, all night long, putting red over and over again.

Don't you know?

The whole city's out in the streets. The whole city's gone into heat.

It's the hour. The Gentlemen rub themselves against the Ladies. The Ladies, they let themselves be rubbed. You, after a long day's work, sit in your room, by the mirror. You try every different shade of red: Rouge Coco, Rouge Dior, Pur Couture, Passion of Yves Saint Laurent...

No man comes in your room to stare at the colors of your lips. One red on, you wipe it off, then try a different one. You like your tubes of red and boxes of tissues used up. But there are more tubes and more boxes stashed in your cabinet drawers. Instead of going out, with the men, you prefer staying in, with your dolls. Nobody else around.

Who told you to wear red like this? In hiding, in vice, and in solitude?

Shame on you! Mama, she told you: Ladies put on a face, for no reason, except this: To be stared at by the men in the streets. A woman who wears a face in solitude, in hiding, is nothing. But a clown. Vicious. Fooling around with nobody there to clap hands or to crack up.

Shame on Mama! City's all whispers, now: She didn't teach her a thing. Not to this girl, here. Not even to put on her face. Ditzies! One like the other! City's all ears, now: It runs in the blood. The viciousness. It flows from the roots. If you don't stop, you'll make her die of shame twice over. You'll make her come back down

here. To scold you, because of all the insults.

For the love of Mama! Put on a face! Be on your way! Take on the streets! Let the Gentlemen who are passing by the front door rub all over you!

Don't you know, now?

Baby Doll! You're so beautiful! You'd make all those city Ladies cry with envy! If you tried just a bit. With a sweet face like this. Pretty. Frail and tiny. A little china figurine. You know, the ones behind the windows of *Yesterday's Dolls*. That break into pieces between the fat and clumsy fingers of the Gentlemen.

It'd take you so little, almost no effort, to turn the city Ladies grey with envy.

If you tried just a bit. Put on some mascara. Powder to bleach your skin. Bright polish on your nails. If you made your mouth all red and your hair all blonde. If you walked on high heels. You know, the ones that clap on the pavements. Then, the men would be staring at you in the streets. Then, you would not be Mama's shame.

If you honored Mama in the whole city. The Gentlemen would dump their Ladies on the pavements. Chase after you all the way home. One and the other. They'd line up at your front door. Knock and knock, day and night. Won't let you go back to sleep. You'd have to do the dirty work no more. The work that you do all weekdays. Soiling your slim dolly fingers. Rubbing raw the Ladies. Eight hours, every day. Their damp and tepid bodies filled with Gentlemen's filth. Because they were rubbed on too much in the streets. You, too, if you wanted. You could put it out. In return, the men would give you all that your heart truly desires: Prada, Gucci, Ralph Lauren, Kenneth Cole, Calvin Klein, Emporio Armani...

If only you made Mama proud. The city would be one big chatterbox. Tittling and tattling all the time. About your looks and your moves. The city would come to your front door, night and day, to see which red you choose to put on your lips, in your room, by the mirror.

Why paint your lips, if no man stares at you doing it? Dying to kiss your mouth because you're doing it? Tiring himself out just to invent ways of kissing it? Keeps kissing it for no reason, except this: He, too, craves to know the pleasures of your lipstick. Flavors made to everybody's taste: Sheer Candy, Caramel, Macaron, Rose Bonbon, Wild Strawberry...

When the night ends, he would leave. On his tongue, the bitter taste of dried berries and musty caramel. On his collar, traces of poppy and crimson lip-prints. His wife, back home, surely wears no poppy or crimson. But mauve.

Why then paint your lips, if no man could remember. Late at night. After dumping you on the pavement. After giving his wife his shirt to wash off the lip-prints. Like at the restaurant, after the meal. When the waiter adds up the food rotting in your belly. Only to remind you that, now, it's time to pay.

Have you been kissed, before, by a man? Grabbed, even? So your skin turns stiff with the stink of his sweat? So his smell burns the inside of your nose? Drags you, bit by bit, to the brink of vomit? Have you seen, before, a man who's nauseous? Because of looking at a woman? One with naked lips? Who's vomited, over her high heels, the morning meal? That's been rotting all day in her belly? Through a mouth resembling a pretty spring flower no more? But a wound?

A woman's red: It is like a hem. Stitching the edges of a gaping hole hidden beneath silk laces or satin flowers. A mouth painted in red, it is a buttonhole. All embroiled at the borders. Patiently waiting to be buttoned up.

But a woman's mouth with no red: It is a wound. The disfigurement of a crack in her mid face. Begging to be mended, immediately. Sewed up from the edges. Sketched anew with red.

Aren't you scared, for want of more paint, that your mouth frazzles? That the scar stretches over your face? Without any warning? Leaving, instead of a face, nothing else? But an obscure and amorphous abyss? Spitting, with no restrain or reserve, words so lunatic and lonesome?

A woman who can't button up her mouth runs the risk to vomit, for want of more restrain or reserve: A tongue spoiled. Words twisted. Rotting, inside her belly, for centuries. Reeking from the moment they cross her lips.

Why keep talking, like this? With no restrain or reserve? Why say things, like these? With no one here to listen?

If you can't button up your mouth: Go out anyway. Walk on the pavement, by the front door. Ask for a cigarette, from the first man who comes by. Lighten up a bit. It's more sophisticated: A woman's face dressed in a halo of smoke, instead of a clamor of words. Like the blur of an old black and white picture. A woman who smokes is a woman who stays mum. To blow smoke, instead of words, must be

to her advantage, surely. A cigarette, lightly lit between the index and the major, with the right pout, says much more than her tongue can abet: Audrey Hepburn, Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe...

But instead, you babble on to your dolls. To your tubes. To your tissues, scattered on the floor. Their pleats and folds stained with more shades of red: Absolu Lancôme, Rouge Serum, Rouge Electric, Extreme Addict...

You can't keep your mouth on a leash. Because you have a deep throat. Loose lips. You can't stop spitting filth in the air that you breathe. Words, so improper. They should never cross a Lady's mouth. You confide in the mirror secrets ringing so foul to others' ears. They shouldn't be uttered out loud. Or, perhaps, to a pebble. Sitting still. In the middle of a desert stone. With nobody around for miles to hear.

Hold your tongue! Say no more. Nothing - of the filth you squeeze out, all day at work, of the Ladies' damp and limp bodies. Of their skin stiff with Gentlemen's stuff. That you wash clean. Mend anew. Make look young and fresh again. By the sheer force of your fingers.

The humiliation of living vicariously. For what? Giving up yourself to this chore. Body and soul. For no reason, except this: When night comes, the Ladies get to go out again on the pavements. Cover themselves with the same fetid and filthy stuff of the Gentlemen. Feel dizzy from sweat retching their throats. Only so that they play, one more time, the lead role in a spectacle where the public claps over and over again.

Baby Doll, don't you remember?
When you were small. You spent so much time playing with Mama's stuff.
Splattering the contours of your mouth with her red. Whitening your little mug with her powder. Making faces, again and again, in her mirror.

You looked like a real clown, already back then.

You made a fool of yourself. Falling to the floor, knocking yourself out. Because you laughed so hard.

What do you think? She saw all that you did - Mama - through the cracked door. The spectacle you made, in the mirror. She had a feeling, already back then, that you were a viscous one, small as you were. That nobody could fix you.

You had the devil under your skin.

Remember, Baby Doll?

After school hours, the girls at your age were already walking the streets. Dragging their feet on their way home. Trying to squeeze chocolate or candy out of the Gentlemen on the pavements. But you – don't you remember? – you stepped up the pace instead. You spoke with nobody. You walked straight ahead. You stared at your feet. You went hiding in Mama's room.

You acted like you were different.

You emptied Mama's vanity case and you emptied her little perfume bottles. You drank the little perfume bottles, one after the other, to the last itty-bitty droplet. It cost her dearly, your little games. You wouldn't drink cheap: Giorgio Armani, Cacharel, Flora de Gucci, Chanel n°5...

Broken hearted, she found you night after night, red handed. Drowned in vice. Passed on the floor. With the look of a whore, who's been hustling all night. Who's going to wake up the next morning with the headache. Her tongue coated. Her eyes turned red. Because of the shame.

She did all she could do! Nobody should insult her the way you do! All a Mama could do, she did.

Remember, Baby Doll?

The time she spent rubbing you raw. In the basin before bedtime. The next morning, soaping you up, again. From head to toe, before the morning meal. All the time it took her to scrub you clean from the filth stuffed in you skin. Despite the cramps in her arms and the fatigue in her fingers. She did it for you. Over an hour, each time. Before sleep, after sleep. She scrubbed your face. Made it shine like clockwork. Scrubbed your back. The nape of your neck. Wiped off the filth from your arm folds. From your leg folds. From between your toes. From between your neck and your chin. Washed behind your ears. Washed inside your ears. Washed your head with a special shampoo. The one that gave it a natural Doll shine.

The water turned black as your skin began to bleach, like wax.

After the bath, at bedtime and then again in the morning: She had to dry your body and your hair. Cover you with lotion lest your skin dried too before due age. Then, it wasn't it. She had to polish your nails. Cut them. File your nails. On the corners and on the edges. Run the brush through your hair. Count to thirty-six. Out loud, Baby. Thirty. Thirty-one. Thirty-two. Three. Five. Six. Never forget the

order of things. Or else start all over, again. With the brush. It took so long. You remember? Your hair was so long and so beautiful. Back then.

How beautiful you were: In the nightgown she'd ordered from the catalogue. And the dress she put on you in the morning. Her favorite! The one with the ribbon and the bow. You were the perfect Baby Doll.

She spent them, those hours, hadn't she? Telling you how to put on a face? At that age already, when you were small?

Look in the mirror. First: Draw on the borders. Don't bleed over the lines. Add in with little dabs. Remember: From within to without. From the flesh to the fringe. Scarlet: it makes their knees go weak. Crimson: It's made for you to please. Vermillion: So the men would stare at you in the streets. Mauve: So you won't be forgotten completely. Red-blood: That, be very careful, Baby Doll. You don't know what it will make them do. Cardinal: It's for the defense. Don't forget: It's to keep the distance.

And those times, when she dragged you on the pavement. By the front door. To show you how they are. This's what they look like. They're short. They're fat. This's how they smell like: The sweat. The cigarette.

It won't bother. The stink. Not at the beginning. It's how they recognize one another.

The Ladies, they spray on: Dolce & Gabbana, Dalhia Noir from Givenchy, Lancôme, Gaultier...
It's to make a barrage.

You know, Baby Doll? That's what life's about, and all that jazz.
The men need the woman.
The women, they need the men, too.
It makes the world go around.

But love: There is no need for that.

The men, they flirt. But only because they're blue. The women, they must put up with it. But only because there's nothing left to do. That's what's been done for so many centuries. For more time than you can even remember.

Who do you think you are – barefaced – to go against history?

Who do you think you are – barefaced – to go against history?

They are not to your taste? Not important...
They are not very handsome? True...
They stink like wild boars? True too...
No doubt, you deserve better...

But how many of them, when night comes, would pamper you like
Mama used to do? Tell you stories of princes who turn into frogs?
Hum you pretty tunes? That shoo away, from your eyelids, the scare of
meanie wolves and stinky beards?

In those stories, always, there's a Gentleman who keeps hiding. At the bot-
tom of a cave. Or in the corner of an attic. Sitting all by himself. Playing, he
too, with his dolls. For his pleasure only: He's got collections. Unheard of.
Only for his eyes to see.

Better believe it, Baby! Those stories, that's what life is about, and all
that jazz...
If you don't believe in them, they won't turn true. You've got to think
they're real, for them to be real. Then: All that's well will end well!

But don't go thinking it's so easy! That in real life, frogs turn into princ-
es! That wolves won't, in the end, gulp up little girls!

There must be a price to pay. You have got to sweat for it. Everyday. Take
it in. Keep on persevering. Learn to do things in the right order. Properly.
Know your role by heart. Say the lines tailor-fit for your mouth. With nat-
uralism and verisimilitude. Know your text from memory. Be wary of losses
of memory. Avoid by all means any twist of the tongue.

Who do you think you are – dummy – to go against stories?

It takes time. It takes effort.

She told you all there is to tell. Showed you all there is to see. Never
fight back. Let it pass over you. Let him fiddle around. Give him all
that he wants. Think about something else. Best to look the other
way. Stop wiggling around, already...

She told you all there is to tell. Showed you all there is to see. Never fight back. Let it pass over you. Let him fiddle around. Give him all that he wants. Think about something else. Best to look the other way. Stop wiggling around, already...

It ends, yes, faster than you think. You'll know it, when it stops. It's the smell. It burns inside your nose. It's stronger than any perfume. It's the rubbing. Get it?

After it's over: There's nothing left to do. Except: Finish in a flourish. Without vomit. Get out your tube of red. Little dabs. From within to without. From the flesh to the fringe...

That's all! That's it! It's life, and all that jazz! Now, it's time to go home! It wasn't that difficult!

She showed you what to do. She showed you how to play your part. Already then, when you were small.

That one night, remember?

She dragged you out, on the pavement, by the front door. So you would get rubbed on, just a little bit. He was fat. He smelled rank. So you knew what to expect. Later on. So you won't be surprised. When you grow up...

You looked like you got it, that night...

Shame on Mama! You didn't get it at all! You didn't get anything! You can't even remember! Now: You're the laughing stock of the whole city.

She should have let you rot in your room. Like an ungrateful brat. She should have stopped your little games, already when you were little. She should have known that, a vicious one like you would like better to bite on the lipstick bar – like on chocolate – instead of playing the Lady.

But sweetheart! You know, Mama loves her Baby Doll so much! She wishes she could hold her tight in her arms, never let her go. Despite all the odds. Save her from all of the hurt. The pavements. The men.

It hurts. Do not - don't ever - doubt that. The very first time. Don't forget.

But then, the time comes. Nothing you can do about that. It's life, and all that jazz. When Mama must go. You know? Against her will. Let her Baby Doll brave the streets in the city, all by herself.

That's why Mama must teach Baby all there is to know. Before leaving. Warn her against everything that goes on, in the streets. Tell her about what will happen to her, when she goes out. Show her what is waiting there, on the outside. And how to protect herself, against all of it, with red.

You must believe in stories, Baby. Do not - don't ever - doubt them. Because then, there would be nothing left. They married and lived happily ever after. Now go to sleep, Baby, time to sleep...

But for the love of Mama! Stop smearing your face with paint like a little girl. All night long. Fiddling with those Ladies' limp and used-up bodies. All week. And in the weekend, locking yourself up, in your room. All afternoon. To mend dolls made of rubber plastic. Ceramic. Paper-mache. Filthy and used up, too. After you've spent all morning digging them up in flea markets.

Soon, you too! You're going to smell cheap, like your dolls!

Soon, you too! You're going to smell like plastic!

Why? After rubbing all week those Ladies' damp and tepid bodies? Do you still want to rub plastic and cheap fabric? Stitch up and mend clay-cold figurines?

Do you think, perhaps, that dolls would turn into men – by magic – if rubbed so much? Do you think that their eyes made of glass, even by the dozen, could replace the look of a real man?

But, look now, dummy! Because of all the bickering between your teeth, you've made a big mess, again. Wipe this! Find another red, tailor-fit for your lips. Apply yourself, this time around! Start all over again."