

Left to his own devices

It took Milton a solid week to get the lipstick just right. The edges can be hard to cover. He traced lips he had decided were quite full, pouty almost, with patience; left them glistening moist without blotting. In the background the message played loudly over stereo speakers: *Welcome to the voice messaging service. Please enter your passcode. Or if you are not at your own phone press the star key or press the pound key to leave a message in another mailbox.* Milton didn't bother to listen, the loop was always the same: *There are no messages in your mailbox.* His dress swooshed over the bedroom carpet to the first newly cleaned mirror. He heard her voice again, *Welcome to the voice...* Staring intensely into his own eyes, he moved forward, backed away. The lip imprints remained; two textured pouches pressed on glass. *Please enter your passcode...* He spun away from that one to the full-length bathroom mirror, extending a leg for full effect. The lines were perfect as they must be: navy pumps, narrow ankle, low hemline, gloved hands, rouged cheeks, blue eyelids, bright red lips. He swooned at the sound, or *press the pound key to leave a message*, puckered tight, pressing hard against the surface. His heart fluttered. The hallway mirror was just large enough for Milton's face. He moved his lips as she repeated *the voice messaging service. Please enter your passcode. Or if you are not at your own phone...* never getting angry and never slowing down. There were three more mirrors left in the house, forty minutes left on the tape, yet somehow Milton knew this was a dance that never had to end.

