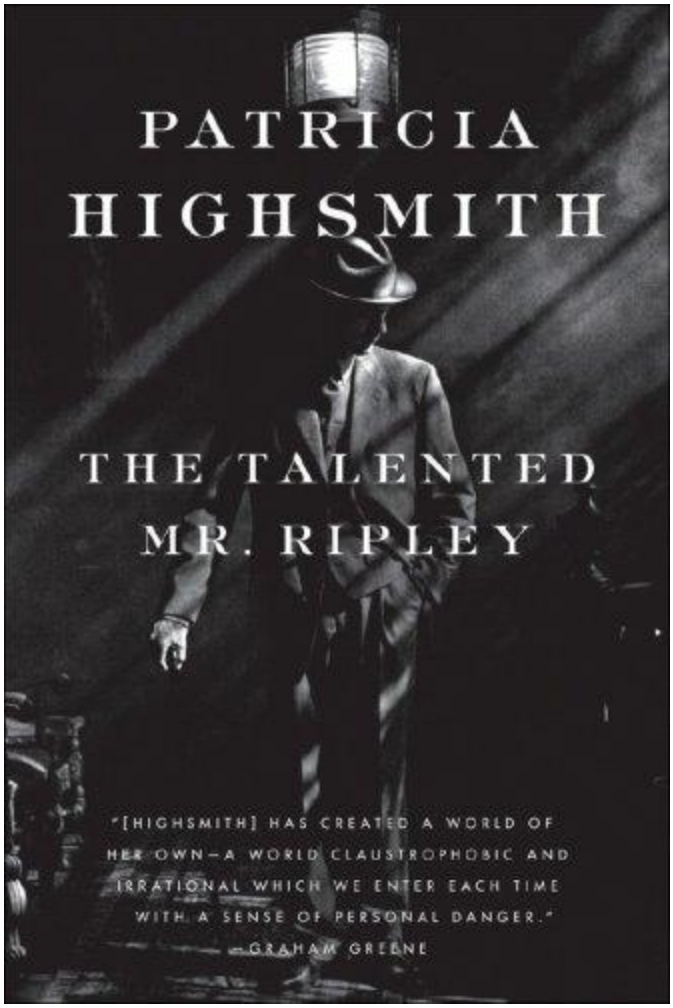

The

Talented

Mr Ripley

By

Patricia

Highsmith

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1

Tom glanced behind him and saw the man coming out of the Green Cage, heading his way. Tom walked faster. There was no doubt that the man was after him. Tom had noticed him five minutes ago, eyeing him carefully from a table, as if he weren't *quite* sure, but almost. He had looked sure enough for Tom to down his drink in a hurry, pay and get out.

At the corner Tom leaned forward and trotted across Fifth Avenue. There was Raoul's. Should he take a chance and go in for another drink? Tempt fate and all that? Or should he beat it over to Park Avenue and try losing him in a few dark doorways? He went into Raoul's.

Automatically, as he strolled to an empty space at the bar, he looked around to see if there was anyone he knew. There was the big man with red hair, whose name he always forgot, sitting at a table with a blonde girl. The red-haired man waved a hand, and Tom's hand went up limply in response. He

slid one leg over a stool and faced the door challengingly, yet with a flagrant casualness.

‘Gin and tonic, please,’ he said to the barman.

Was this the kind of man they would send after him? Was he, wasn’t he, was he? He didn’t look like a policeman or a detective at all. He looked like a businessman, somebody’s father, well-dressed, well-fed, greying at the temples, an air of uncertainty about him. Was that the kind they sent on a job like this, maybe to start chatting with you in a bar, and then bang!—the hand on the shoulder, the other hand displaying a policeman’s badge. *Tom Ripley, you’re under arrest*. Tom watched the door.

Here he came. The man looked around, saw him and immediately looked away. He removed his straw hat, and took a place around the curve of the bar.

My God, what did he want? He certainly wasn’t a *pervert*, Tom thought for the second time, though now his tortured brain groped and produced the actual word, as if the word could protect him, because he would rather the man be a pervert than a policeman. To a pervert, he could simply say, ‘No, thank you,’ and smile and walk away. Tom slid back on the stool, bracing himself.

Tom saw the man make a gesture of postponement to the barman, and come

around the bar towards him. Here it was! Tom stared at him, paralysed. They couldn't give you more than ten years, Tom thought. Maybe fifteen, but with good conduct—In the instant the man's lips parted to speak, Tom had a pang of desperate, agonized regret.

'Pardon me, are you Tom Ripley?'

'Yes.'

'My name is Herbert Greenleaf. Richard Greenleaf's father.' The expression on his face was more confusing to Tom than if he had focused a gun on him. The face was friendly, smiling and hopeful. 'You're a friend of Richard's, aren't you?'

It made a faint connection in his brain. Dickie Greenleaf. A tall blond fellow. He had quite a bit of money, Tom remembered. 'Oh, Dickie Greenleaf. Yes.'

'At any rate, you know Charles and Marta Schriever. They're the ones who told me about you, that you might—uh— Do you think we could sit down at a table?'

'Yes,' Tom said agreeably, and picked up his drink. He followed the man towards an empty table at the back of the little room. Reprieved, he thought. Free! Nobody was going to arrest him. This was about something else. No matter what it was, it wasn't grand larceny or tampering with the mails or

whatever they called it. Maybe Richard was in some kind of jam. Maybe Mr Greenleaf wanted help, or advice. Tom knew just what to say to a father like Mr Greenleaf.

'I wasn't quite sure you were Tom Ripley,' Mr Greenleaf said. 'I've seen you only once before, I think. Didn't you come up to the house once with Richard?'

'I think I did.'

'The Schrievers gave me a description of you, too. We've all been trying to reach you, because the Schrievers wanted us to meet at their house. Somebody told them you went to the Green Cage bar now and then. This is the first night I've tried to find you, so I suppose I should consider myself lucky.' He smiled. 'I wrote you a letter last week, but maybe you didn't get it.'

'No, I didn't.' Marc wasn't forwarding his mail, Tom thought. Damn him. Maybe there was a cheque there from Auntie Dottie. 'I moved a week or so ago,' Tom added.

'Oh, I see. I didn't say much in my letter. Only that I'd like to see you and have a chat with you. The Schrievers seemed to think you knew Richard quite well.'

'I remember him, yes.'

‘But you’re not writing to him now?’ He looked disappointed.

‘No. I don’t think I’ve seen Dickie for a couple of years.’

‘He’s been in Europe for two years. The Schrievers spoke very highly of you, and thought you might have some influence on Richard if you were to write to him. I want him to come home. He has responsibilities here—but just now he ignores anything that I or his mother try to tell him.’

Tom was puzzled. ‘Just what did the Schrievers say?’

‘They said—apparently they exaggerated a little—that you and Richard were very good friends. I suppose they took it for granted you were writing him all along. You see, I know so few of Richard’s friends any more—’ He glanced at Tom’s glass, as if he would have liked to offer him a drink, at least, but Tom’s glass was nearly full.

Tom remembered going to a cocktail party at the Schrievers’ with Dickie Greenleaf. Maybe the Greenleafs were more friendly with the Schrievers than he was, and that was how it had all come about, because he hadn’t seen the Schrievers more than three or four times in his life. And the last time, Tom thought, was the night he had worked out Charley Schriever’s income tax for him. Charley was a TV director, and he had been in a complete muddle with his free-lance accounts. Charley had thought he was a genius for having doped out his tax and made it lower than the one Charley had

arrived at, and perfectly legitimately lower. Maybe that was what had prompted Charley's recommendation of him to Mr Greenleaf. Judging him from that night, Charley could have told Mr Greenleaf that he was intelligent, level-headed, scrupulously honest, and very willing to do a favour. It was a slight error.

'I don't suppose you know of anybody else close to Richard who might be able to wield a little influence?' Mr Greenleaf asked rather pitifully.

There was Buddy Lankenau, Tom thought, but he didn't want to wish a chore like this on Buddy. 'I'm afraid I don't,' Tom said, shaking his head.

'Why won't Richard come home?'

'He says he prefers living over there. But his mother's quite ill right now—Well, those are family problems. I'm sorry to annoy you like this.' He passed a hand in a distraught way over his thin, neatly combed grey hair. 'He says he's painting. There's no harm in that, but he hasn't the talent to be a painter. He's got great talent for boat designing, though, if he'd just put his mind to it.' He looked up as a waiter spoke to him. 'Scotch and soda, please. Dewar's. You're not ready?'

'No, thanks,' Tom said.

Mr Greenleaf looked at Tom apologetically. 'You're the first of Richard's friends who's even been willing to listen. They all take the attitude that I'm

trying to interfere with his life.'

Tom could easily understand that. 'I certainly wish I could help,' he said politely. He remembered now that Dickie's money came from a shipbuilding company. Small sailing boats. No doubt his father wanted him to come home and take over the family firm. Tom smiled at Mr Greenleaf, meaninglessly, then finished his drink. Tom was on the edge of his chair, ready to leave, but the disappointment across the table was almost palpable.

'Where is he staying in Europe?' Tom asked, not caring a damn where he was staying.

'In a town called Mongibello, south of Naples. There's not even a library there, he tells me. Divides his time between sailing and painting. He's bought a house there. Richard has his own income—nothing huge, but enough to live on in Italy, apparently. Well, every man to his own taste, but I'm sure I can't see the attractions of the place.' Mr Greenleaf smiled bravely. 'Can't I offer you a drink, Mr Ripley?' he asked when the waiter came with his Scotch and soda.

Tom wanted to leave. But he hated to leave the man sitting alone with his fresh drink. 'Thanks, I think I will,' he said, and handed the waiter his glass.

'Charley Schriever told me you were in the insurance business,' Mr Greenleaf said pleasantly.

‘That was a little while ago. I—’ But he didn’t want to say he was working for the Department of Internal Revenue, not now. ‘I’m in the accounting department of an advertising agency at the moment.’

‘Oh?’

Neither said anything for a minute. Mr Greenleaf’s eyes were fixed on him with a pathetic, hungry expression. What on earth could he say? Tom was sorry he had accepted the drink. ‘How old is Dickie now, by the way?’ he asked.

‘He’s twenty-five.’

So am I, Tom thought. Dickie was probably having the time of his life over there. An income, a house, a boat. Why should he want to come home? Dickie’s face was becoming clearer in his memory: he had a big smile, blondish hair with crisp waves in it, a happy-go-lucky face. Dickie was lucky. What was he himself doing at twenty-five? Living from week to week. No bank account. Dodging cops now for the first time in his life. He had a talent for mathematics. Why in hell didn’t they pay him for it, somewhere? Tom realized that all his muscles had tensed, that the match-cover in his fingers was mashed sideways, nearly flat. He was bored, God-damned bloody bored, bored, bored! He wanted to be back at the bar, by himself.

Tom took a gulp of his drink. I'd be very glad to write to Dickie, if you give me his address,' he said quickly. 'I suppose he'll remember me. We were at a weekend party once out on Long Island, I remember. Dickie and I went out and gathered mussels, and everyone had them for breakfast.' Tom smiled. 'A couple of us got sick, and it wasn't a very good party. But I remember Dickie talking that weekend about going to Europe. He must have left just—'

'I remember!' Mr Greenleaf said. That was the last weekend Richard was here. I think he told me about the mussels.' He laughed rather loudly.

'I came up to your apartment a few times, too,' Tom went on, getting into the spirit of it. 'Dickie showed me some ship models that were sitting on a table in his room.'

'Those are only childhood efforts!' Mr Greenleaf was beaming. 'Did he ever show you his frame models? Or his drawings?'

Dickie hadn't, but Tom said brightly, 'Yes! Of course he did. Pen-and-ink drawings. Fascinating, some of them.' Tom had never seen them, but he could see them now, precise draughtsman's drawings with every line and bolt and screw labelled, could see Dickie smiling, holding them up for him to look at, and he could have gone on for several minutes describing details for Mr Greenleaf's delight, but he checked himself.

‘Yes, Richard’s got talent along those lines,’ Mr Greenleaf said with a satisfied air.

‘I think he has,’ Tom agreed. His boredom had slipped into another gear. Tom knew the sensations. He had them sometimes at parties, but generally when he was having dinner with someone with whom he hadn’t wanted to have dinner in the first place, and the evening got longer and longer. Now he could be maniacally polite for perhaps another whole hour, if he had to be, before something in him exploded and sent him running out of the door. I’m sorry I’m not quite free now or I’d be very glad to go over and see if I could persuade Richard myself. Maybe I could have some influence on him,’ he said, just because Mr Greenleaf wanted him to say that.

‘If you seriously think so—that is, I don’t know if you’re planning a trip to Europe or not.’

‘No, I’m not.’

‘Richard was always so influenced by his friends. If you or somebody like you who knew him could get a leave of absence, I’d even send them over to talk to him. I think it’d be worth more than my going over, anyway. I don’t suppose you could possibly get a leave of absence from your present job, could you?’

Tom’s heart took a sudden leap. He put on an expression of reflection. It

was a possibility. Something in him had smelt it out and leapt at it even before his brain. Present job: nil. He might have to leave town soon, anyway. He wanted to leave New York. ‘I might,’ he said carefully, with the same pondering expression, as if he were even now going over the thousands of little ties that could prevent him.

‘If you did go, I’d be glad to take care of your expenses, that goes without saying. Do you really think you might be able to arrange it? Say, this fall?’

It was already the middle of September. Tom stared at the gold signet ring with the nearly worn-away crest on Mr Greenleaf’s little finger. ‘I think I might. I’d be glad to see Richard again—especially if you think I might be of some help.’

‘I do! I think he’d listen to you. Then the mere fact that you don’t know him very well—If you put it to him strongly why you think he ought to come home, he’d know you hadn’t any axe to grind.’ Mr Greenleaf leaned back in his chair, looking at Tom with approval. ‘Funny thing is, Jim Burke and his wife—Jim’s my partner—they went by Mongibello last year when they were on a cruise. Richard promised he’d come home when the winter began. Last winter. Jim’s given him up. What boy of twenty-five listens to an old man sixty or more? You’ll probably succeed where the rest of us have failed!’

‘I hope so,’ Tom said modestly.

‘How about another drink? How about a nice brandy?’

2

It was after midnight when Tom started home. Mr Greenleaf had offered to drop him off in a taxi, but Tom had not wanted him to see where he lived—in a dingy brownstone between Third and Second with a ‘ROOMS TO LET’ sign hanging out. For the last two and half weeks Tom had been living with Bob Delancey, a young man he hardly knew, but Bob had been the only one of Tom’s friends and acquaintances in New York who had volunteered to put him up when he had been without a place to stay. Tom had not asked any of his friends up to Bob’s, and had not even told anybody where he was living. The main advantage of Bob’s place was that he could get his George McAlpin mail there with the minimum chance of detection. But the smelly john down the hall that didn’t lock, that grimy single room that looked as if it had been lived in by a thousand different people who had left behind their particular kind of filth and never lifted a hand to clean it, those slithering stacks of *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar* and those big chi-chi smoked-glass bowls all over the place, filled with tangles of string and pencils and cigarette butts and decaying fruit! Bob was a freelance window decorator for shops and department stores, but now the only work he did

was occasional jobs for Third Avenue antique shops, and some antique shop had given him the smoked-glass bowls as a payment for something. Tom had been shocked at the sordidness of the place, shocked that he even knew anybody who lived like that, but he had known that he wouldn't live there very long. And now Mr Greenleaf had turned up. Something always turned up. That was Tom's philosophy.

Just before he climbed the brownstone steps, Tom stopped and looked carefully in both directions. Nothing but an old woman airing her dog, and a weaving old man coming around the corner from Third Avenue. If there was any sensation he hated, it was that of being followed, by *anybody*. And lately he had it all the time. He ran up the steps.

A lot the sordidness mattered now, he thought as he went into the room. As soon as he could get a passport, he'd be sailing for Europe, probably in a first-class cabin. Waiters to bring him things when he pushed a button! Dressing for dinner, strolling into a big dining-room, talking with people at his table like a gentleman! He could congratulate himself on tonight, he thought. He had behaved just right. Mr Greenleaf couldn't possibly have had the impression that he had wangled the invitation to Europe. Just the opposite. He wouldn't let Mr Greenleaf down. He'd do his very best with Dickie. Mr Greenleaf was such a decent fellow himself, he took it for

granted that everybody else in the world was decent, too. Tom had almost forgotten such people existed.

Slowly he took off his jacket and untied his tie, watching every move he made as if it were somebody else's movements he was watching. Astonishing how much straighter he was standing now, what a different look there was in his face. It was one of the few times in his life that he felt pleased with himself. He put a hand into Bob's glutted closet and thrust the hangers aggressively to right and left to make room for his suit. Then he went into the bathroom. The old rusty showerhead sent a jet against the shower curtain and another jet in an erratic spiral that he could hardly catch to wet himself, but it was better than sitting in the filthy tub.

When he woke up the next morning Bob was not there, and Tom saw from a glance at his bed that he hadn't come home. Tom jumped out of bed, went to the two-ring burner and put on coffee. Just as well Bob wasn't home this morning. He didn't want to tell Bob about the European trip. All that crummy bum would see in it was a free trip. And Ed Martin, too, probably, and Bert Visser, and all the other crumbs he knew. He wouldn't tell any of them, and he wouldn't have anybody seeing him off. Tom began to whistle. He was invited to dinner tonight at the Greenleafs' apartment on Park Avenue.

Fifteen minutes later, showered, shaved, and dressed in a suit and a striped tie that he thought would look well in his passport photo, Tom was strolling up and down the room with a cup of black coffee in his hand, waiting for the morning mail. After the mail, he would go over to Radio City to take care of the passport business. What should he do this afternoon? Go to some art exhibits, so he could chat about them tonight with the Greenleafs. Do some research on Burke-Greenleaf Watercraft, Inc., so Mr Greenleaf would know that he took an interest in his work?

The whack of the mailbox came faintly through the open window, and Tom went downstairs. He waited until the mailman was down the front steps and out of sight before he took the letter addressed to George McAlpin down from the edge of the mailbox frame where the mailman had stuck it. Tom ripped it open. Out came a cheque for one hundred and nineteen dollars and fifty-four cents, payable to the Collector of Internal Revenue. Good old Mrs Edith W. Superaugh! Paid without a whimper, without even a telephone call. It was a good omen. He went upstairs again, tore up Mrs Superaugh's envelope and dropped it into the garbage bag.

He put her cheque into a manila envelope in the inside pocket of one of his jackets in the closet. This raised his total in cheques to one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three dollars and fourteen cents, he calculated in his

head. A pity that he couldn't cash them. Or that some idiot hadn't paid in cash yet, or made out a cheque to George McAlpin, but so far no one had. Tom had a bank messenger's identification card that he had found somewhere with an old date on it that he could try to alter, but he was afraid he couldn't get away with cashing the cheques, even with a forged letter of authorization for whatever the sum was. So it amounted to no more than a practical joke, really. Good clean sport. He wasn't stealing money from anybody. Before he went to Europe, he thought, he'd destroy the cheques. There were seven more prospects on his list. Shouldn't he try just one more in these last ten days before he sailed? Walking home last evening, after seeing Mr Greenleaf, he had thought that if Mrs Superaugh and Carlos de Sevilla paid up, he'd call it quits. Mr de Sevilla hadn't paid up yet—he needed a good scare by telephone to put the fear of God into him, Tom thought—but Mrs Superaugh had been so easy, he was tempted to try just one more.

Tom took a mauve-coloured stationery box from his suitcase in the closet. There were a few sheets of stationery in the box, and below them a stack of various forms he had taken from the Internal Revenue office when he had worked there as a stockroom clerk a few weeks ago. On the very bottom was his list of prospects—carefully chosen people who lived in the Bronx

or in Brooklyn and would not be too inclined to pay the New York office a personal visit, artists and writers and freelance people who had no withholding taxes, and who made from seven to twelve thousand a year. In that bracket, Tom figured that people seldom hired professional tax men to compute their taxes, while they earned enough money to be logically accused of having made a two—or three-hundred dollar error in their tax computations. There was William J. Slatterer, journalist; Philip Robillard, musician; Frieda Hoehn, illustrator; Joseph J. Gennari, photographer; Frederick Reddington, artist; Frances Karnegis—Tom had a hunch about Reddington. He was a comic-book artist. He probably didn't know whether he was coming or going.

He chose two forms headed 'NOTICE OF ERROR IN COMPUTATION', slipped a carbon between them, and began to copy rapidly the data below Reddington's name on his list. Income: $11,250 Exemptions: 1. Deductions: $600. Credits: nil. Remittance: nil. Interest: (he hesitated a moment) $2.16. Balance due: $233.76. Then he took a piece of typewriter paper stamped with the Department of Internal Revenue's Lexington Avenue address from his supply in his carbon folder, crossed out the address with one slanting line of his pen, and typed below it:

Dear Sir:

Due to an overflow at our regular Lexington Avenue
office, your reply should be sent to:
Adjustment Department
Attention of George McAlpin
187 E. 51 Street, New York 22, New York.
Thank you.
Ralph F. Fischer (Gen. Dir. Adj. Dept.)

Tom signed it with a scrolly, illegible signature. He put the other forms away in case Bob should come in suddenly, and picked up the telephone. He had decided to give Mr Reddington a preliminary prod. He got Mr Reddington's number from information and called it. Mr Reddington was at home. Tom explained the situation briefly, and expressed surprise that Mr Reddington had not yet received the notice from the Adjusting Department.

'That should have gone out a few days ago,' Tom said. 'You'll undoubtedly get it tomorrow. We've been a little rushed around here.'

'But I've *paid* my tax,' said the alarmed voice at the other end. 'They were all—'

'These things can happen, you know, when the income's earned on a freelance basis with no withholding tax. We've been over your return very carefully, Mr Reddington. There's no mistake. And we wouldn't like to slap

a lien on the office you work for or your agent or whatever—' Here he chuckled. A friendly, personal chuckle generally worked wonders. '—but we'll, have to do that unless you pay within forty-eight hours. I'm sorry the notice hasn't reached you before now. As I said, we've been pretty—'

'Is there anyone there I can talk to about it if I come in?' Mr Reddington asked anxiously. 'That's a hell of a lot of money!'

'Well, there is, of course.' Tom's voice always got folksy at this point. He sounded like a genial old codger of sixty-odd, who might be as patient as could be if Mr Reddington came in, but who wouldn't yield by so much as a red cent, for all the talking and explaining Mr Reddington might do. George McAlpin represented the Tax Department of the United States of America, suh. 'You can talk to me, of course,' Tom drawled, 'but there's absolutely no mistake about this, Mr Reddington. I'm just thinking of saving you your time. You can come in if you want to, but I've got all your records right here in my hand.'

Silence. Mr Reddington wasn't going to ask him anything about records, because he probably didn't know what to begin asking. But if Mr Reddington were to ask him to explain what it was all about, Tom had a lot of hash about net income versus accrued income, balance due versus computation, interest at six per cent annum accruing from due date of the

tax until paid on any balance which represents tax shown on original return, which he could deliver in a slow voice as incapable of interruption as a Sherman tank. So far, no one had insisted in coming in person to hear more of that. Mr Reddington was backing down, too. Tom could hear it in the silence.

'All right,' Mr Reddington said in a tone of collapse. I'll read the notice when I get it tomorrow.'

'All right, Mr Reddington,' he said, and hung up.

Tom sat there for a moment, giggling, the palms of his thin hands pressed together between his knees. Then he jumped up, put Bob's typewriter away again, combed his light-brown hair neatly in front of the mirror, and set off for Radio City.

3

'HELLO-O, Tom, my boy!" Mr Greenleaf said in a voice that promised good martinis, a gourmet's dinner, and a bed for the night in case he got too tired to go home. 'Emily, this is Tom Ripley!'

'I'm so happy to meet you!' she said warmly.

'How do you do, Mrs Greenleaf?'

She was very much what he had expected—blonde, rather tall and slender, with enough formality to keep him on his good behaviour, yet with the

same naive good-will-toward-all that Mr Greenleaf had. Mr Greenleaf led them into the living-room. Yes, he had been here before with Dickie.

‘Mr Ripley’s in the insurance business,’ Mr Greenleaf announced, and Tom thought he must have had a few already, or he was very nervous tonight, because Tom had given him quite a description last night of the advertising agency where he had said he was working.

‘Not a very exciting job,’ Tom said modestly to Mrs Greenleaf.

A maid came into the room with a tray of martinis and canapés.

‘Mr Ripley’s been here before,’ Mr Greenleaf said. ‘He’s come here with Richard.’

‘Oh, has he? I don’t believe I met you, though.’ She smiled. ‘Are you from New York?’

‘No, I’m from Boston,’ Tom said. That was true.

About thirty minutes later—just the right time later, Tom thought, because the Greenleafs had kept insisting that he drink another and another martini—they went into a dining-room off the living-room, where a table was set for three with candles, huge dark-blue dinner napkins, and a whole cold chicken in aspic. But first there was céleri rémoulade. Tom was very fond of it. He said so.

‘So is Richard!’ Mrs Greenleaf said. ‘He always liked it the way our cook

makes it. A pity you can't take him some.'

'I'll put it with the socks,' Tom said, smiling, and Mrs Greenleaf laughed. She had told him she would like him to take Richard some black woollen socks from Brooks Brothers, the kind Richard always wore.

The conversation was dull, and the dinner superb. In answer to a question of Mrs Greenleaf's, Tom told her that he was working for an advertising firm called Rothenberg, Fleming and Barter. When he referred to it again, he deliberately called it Reddington, Fleming and Parker. Mr Greenleaf didn't seem to notice the difference. Tom mentioned the firm's name a second time when he and Mr Greenleaf were alone in the living room after dinner.

'Did you go to school in Boston?' Mr Greenleaf asked.

'No, sir. I went to Princeton for a while, then I visited another aunt in Denver and went to college there.' Tom waited, hoping Mr Greenleaf would ask him something about Princeton, but he didn't. Tom could have discussed the system of teaching history, the campus restrictions, the atmosphere at the weekend dances, the political tendencies of the student body, anything. Tom had been very friendly last summer with a Princeton junior who had talked of nothing but Princeton, so that Tom had finally pumped him for more and more, foreseeing a time when he might be able to use the information. Tom had told the Greenleafs that he had been raised by

his Aunt Dottie in Boston. She had taken him to Denver when he was sixteen, and actually he had only finished high school there, but there had been a young man named Don Mizell rooming in his Aunt Bea's house in Denver who had been going to the University of Colorado. Tom felt as if he had gone there, too.

'Specialise in anything in particular?' Mr Greenleaf asked.

'Sort of divided myself between accounting and English composition,' Tom replied with a smile, knowing it was such a dull answer that nobody would possibly pursue it.

Mrs Greenleaf came in with a photograph album, and Tom sat beside her on the sofa while she turned through it. Richard taking his first step, Richard in a ghastly full-page colour photograph dressed and posed as the Blue Boy, with long blond curls. The album was not interesting to him until Richard got to be sixteen or so, long-legged, slim, with the wave tightening in his hair. So far as Tom could see, he had hardly changed between sixteen and twenty-three or -four, when the pictures of him stopped, and it was astonishing to Tom how little the bright, naive smile changed. Tom could not help feeling that Richard was not very intelligent, or else he loved to be photographed and thought he looked best with his mouth spread from ear to ear, which was not very intelligent of him, either.

‘I haven’t gotten round to pasting these in yet,’ Mrs Greenleaf said, handing him a batch of loose pictures. ‘These are all from Europe.’

They were more interesting: Dickie in what looked like a café in Paris, Dickie on a beach. In several of them he was frowning.

‘This is Mongibello, by the way,’ Mrs Greenleaf said, indicating a picture of Dickie pulling a rowboat up on the sand. The picture was backgrounded by dry, rocky mountains and a fringe of little white houses along the shore. ‘And here’s the girl there, the only other American who lives there.’

‘Marge Sherwood,’ Mr Greenleaf supplied. He sat across the room, but he was leaning forward, following the picture-showing intently.

The girl was in a bathing suit on the beach, her arms around her knees, healthy and unsophisticated-looking, with tousled, short blonde hair—the good-egg type. There was a good picture of Richard in shorts, sitting on the parapet of a terrace. He was smiling, but it was not the same smile, Tom saw. Richard looked more poised in the European pictures.

Tom noticed that Mrs Greenleaf was staring down at the rug in front of her. He remembered the moment at the table when she had said, ‘I wish I’d never heard of Europe!’ and Mr Greenleaf had given her an anxious glance and then smiled at him, as if such outbursts had occurred before. Now he saw tears in her eyes. Mr Greenleaf was getting up to come to her.

‘Mrs Greenleaf,’ Tom said gently, ‘I want you to know that I’ll do everything I can to make Dickie come back.’

‘Bless you, Tom, bless you.’ She pressed Tom’s hand that rested on his thigh.

‘Emily, don’t you think it’s time you went to bed?’ Mr Greenleaf asked, bending over her.

Tom stood up as Mrs Greenleaf did.

‘I hope you’ll come again to pay us a visit before you go, Tom,’ she said. ‘Since Richard’s gone, we seldom have any young men to the house. I miss them.’

‘I’d be delighted to come again,’ Tom said.

Mr Greenleaf went out of the room with her. Tom remained standing, his hands at his sides, his head high. In a large mirror on the wall he could see himself: the upright, self-respecting young man again. He looked quickly away. He was doing the right thing, behaving the right way. Yet he had a feeling of guilt. When he had said to Mrs Greenleaf just now, *I’ll do everything I can...* Well, he meant it. He wasn’t trying to fool anybody.

He felt himself beginning to sweat, and he tried to relax. What was he so worried about? He’d felt so well tonight! When he had said that about Aunt Dottie—

Tom straightened, glancing at the door, but the door had not opened. That had been the only time tonight when he had felt uncomfortable, unreal, the way he might have felt if he had been lying, yet it had been practically the only thing he had said that was true: *My parents died when I was very small. I was raised by my aunt in Boston*.

Mr Greenleaf came into the room. His figure seemed to pulsate and grow larger and larger. Tom blinked his eyes, feeling a sudden terror of him, an impulse to attack him before he was attacked.

'Suppose we sample some brandy?' Mr Greenleaf said, opening a panel beside the fireplace.

It's like a movie, Tom thought. In a minute, Mr Greenleaf or somebody else's voice would say, 'Okay, *cut*!' and he would relax again and find himself back in Raoul's with the gin and tonic in front of him. No, back in the Green Cage.

'Had enough?' Mr Greenleaf asked. 'Don't drink this, if you don't want it.'

Tom gave a vague nod, and Mr Greenleaf looked puzzled for an instant, then poured the two brandies.

A cold fear was running over Tom's body. He was thinking of the incident in the drugstore last week, though that was all over and he wasn't *really* afraid, he reminded himself, not now. There was a drugstore on Second

Avenue whose phone number he gave out to people who insisted on calling him again about their income tax. He gave it out as the phone number of the Adjustment Department where he could be reached only between three-thirty and four on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. At these times, Tom hung around the booth in the drugstore, waiting for the phone to ring. When the druggist had looked at him suspiciously the second time he had been there, Tom had said that he was waiting for a call from his girl friend. Last Friday when he had answered the telephone, a man's voice had said, 'You know what we're talking about, don't you? We know where you live, if you want us to come to your place... We've got the stuff for you, if you've got it for us.' An insistent yet evasive voice, so that Tom had thought it was some kind of a trick and hadn't been able to answer anything. Then, 'Listen, we're coming right over. To your *house*.'

Tom's legs had felt like jelly when he got out of the phone booth, and then he had seen the druggist staring at him, wide-eyed, panicky-looking, and the conversation had suddenly explained itself: the druggist sold dope, and he was afraid that Tom was a police detective who had come to get the goods on *him*. Tom had started laughing, had walked out laughing uproariously, staggering as he went, because his legs were still weak from his own fear.

‘Thinking about Europe?’ Mr Greenleaf’s voice said.

Tom accepted the glass Mr Greenleaf was holding out to him. ‘Yes, I was,’ Tom said.

‘Well, I hope you enjoy your trip, Tom, as well as have some effect on Richard. By the way, Emily likes you a lot. She told me so. I didn’t have to ask her.’ Mr Greenleaf rolled his brandy glass between his hands. ‘My wife has leukaemia, Tom.’

‘Oh. That’s very serious, isn’t it?’

‘Yes. She may not live a year.’

‘I’m sorry to hear that,’ Tom said.

Mr Greenleaf pulled a paper out of his pocket. ‘I’ve got a list of boats. I think the usual Cherbourg way is quickest, and also the most interesting. You’d take the boat train to Paris, then a sleeper down over the Alps to Rome and Naples.’

‘That’d be fine.’ It began to sound exciting to him.

‘You’ll have to catch a bus from Naples to Richard’s village. I’ll write him about you—not telling him that you’re an emissary from me,’ he added, smiling, ‘but I’ll tell him we’ve met. Richard ought to put you up, but if he can’t for some reason, there’re hotels in the town. I expect you and Richard’ll hit it off all right. Now as to money—’ Mr Greenleaf smiled his

fatherly smile. ‘I propose to give you six hundred dollars in traveller’s cheques apart from your round-trip ticket. Does that suit you? The six hundred should see you through nearly two months, and if you need more, all you have to do is wire me, my boy. You don’t look like a young man who’d throw money down the drain.’

‘That sounds ample, sir.’

Mr Greenleaf got increasingly mellow and jolly on the brandy, and Tom got increasingly close-mouthed and sour. Tom wanted to get out of the apartment. And yet he still wanted to go to Europe, and wanted Mr Greenleaf to approve of him. The moments on the sofa were more agonising than the moments in the bar last night when he had been so bored, because now that break into another gear didn’t come. Several times Tom got up with his drink and strolled to the fireplace and back, and when he looked into the mirror he saw that his mouth was turned down at the corners.

Mr Greenleaf was rollicking on about Richard and himself in Paris, when Richard had been ten years old. It was not in the least interesting. If anything happened with the police in the next ten days, Tom thought, Mr Greenleaf would take him in. He could tell Mr. Greenleaf that he’d sublet his apartment in a hurry, or something like that, and simply hide out here.

Tom felt awful, almost physically ill.

‘Mr Greenleaf, I think I should be going.’

‘Now? But I wanted to show you— Well, never mind. Another time.’

Tom knew he should have asked, ‘Show me what?’ and been patient while he was shown whatever it was, but he couldn’t.

‘I want you to visit the yards, of course!’ Mr Greenleaf said cheerfully. ‘When can you come out? Only during your lunch hour, I suppose. I think you should be able to tell Richard what the yards look like these days.’

‘Yes—I could come in my lunch hour.’

‘Give me a call any day, Tom. You’ve got my card with my private number. If you give me half an hour’s notice, I’ll have a man pick you up at your office and drive you out. We’ll have a sandwich as we walk through, and he’ll drive you back.’

‘I’ll call you,’ Tom said. He felt he would faint if he stayed one minute longer in the dimly lighted foyer, but Mr Greenleaf was chuckling again, asking him if he had read a certain book by Henry James.

‘I’m sorry to say I haven’t, sir, not that one,’ Tom said.

‘Well, no matter,’ Mr Greenleaf smiled.

Then they shook hands, a long suffocating squeeze from Mr Greenleaf, and it was over. But the pained, frightened expression was still on his face as he

rode down in the elevator, Tom saw. He leaned in the corner of the elevator in an exhausted way, though he knew as soon as he hit the lobby he would fly out of the door and keep on running, running, all the way home.

4

THE atmosphere of the city became stranger as the days went on. It was as if something had gone out of New York—the realness or the importance of it—and the city was putting on a show just for him, a colossal show with its buses, taxis, and hurrying people on the sidewalks, its television shows in all the Third Avenue bars, its movie marquees lighted up in broad daylight, and its sound effects of thousands of honking horns and human voices, talking for no purpose whatsoever. As if when his boat left the pier on Saturday, the whole city of New York would collapse with a poof like a lot of cardboard on a stage.

Or maybe he was afraid. He hated water. He had never been anywhere before on water, except to New Orleans from New York and back to New York again, but then he had been working on a banana boat mostly below deck, and he had hardly realised he was on water. The few times he had been on deck the sight of water had at first frightened him, then made him feel sick, and he had always run below deck again, where, contrary to what people said, he had felt better. His parents had drowned in Boston Harbour,

and Tom had always thought that probably had something to do with it, because as long as he could remember he had been afraid of water, and he had never learned how to swim. It gave Tom a sick, empty feeling at the pit of his stomach to think that in less than a week he would have water below him, miles deep, and that undoubtedly he would have to look at it most of the time, because people on ocean liners spent most of their time on deck. And it was particularly un-chic to be seasick, he felt. He had never been seasick, but he came very near it several times in those last days, simply thinking about the voyage to Cherbourg.

He had told Bob Delancey that he was moving in a week, but he hadn't said where. Bob did not seem interested, anyway. They saw very little of each other at the Fifty-first Street place. Tom had gone to Marc Priminger's house in East-Forty-fifth Street—he still had the keys—to pick up a couple of things he had forgotten, and he had gone at an hour when he had thought Marc wouldn't be there, but Marc had come in with his new housemate, Joel, a thin drip of a young man who worked for a publishing house, and Marc had put on one of his suave 'Please-do- *just*-as-you-like' acts for Joel's

benefit, though if Joel hadn't been there Marc would have cursed him out in language that even a Portuguese sailor wouldn't have used. Marc (his given name was, of all things, Marcellus) was an ugly mug of a man with a

private income and a hobby of helping out young men in temporary financial difficulties by putting them up in his two-storey, three-bedroom house, and playing God by telling them what they could and couldn't do around the place and by giving them advice as to their lives and their jobs, generally rotten advice. Tom had stayed there three months, though for nearly half that time Marc had been in Florida and he had had the house all to himself, but when Marc had come back he had made a big stink about a few pieces of broken glassware—Marc playing God again, the Stern Father—and Tom had gotten angry enough, for once, to stand up for himself and talk to him back. Whereupon Marc had thrown him out, after collecting sixty-three dollars from him for broken glassware. The old tightwad! He should have been an old maid, Tom thought, at the head of a girls' school. Tom was bitterly sorry he had ever laid eyes on Marc Priminger, and the sooner he could forget Marc's stupid, pig-like eyes, his massive jaw, his ugly hands with the gaudy rings (waving through the air, ordering this and that from everybody), the happier he would be.

The only one of his friends he felt like telling about his European trip was Cleo, and he went to see her on the Thursday before he sailed. Cleo Dobelle was a slim dark-haired girl who could have been anything from twenty-three to thirty, Tom didn't know, who lived with her parents in Grade

Square and painted in a small way—a *very* small way, in fact, on little pieces of ivory no bigger than postage stamps that had to be viewed through a magnifying glass, and Cleo used a magnifying glass when she painted them. ‘But think how convenient it is to be able to carry *all* my paintings in a cigar box! Other painters have rooms and rooms to hold their canvases!’ Cleo said. Cleo lived in her own suite of rooms with a little bath and kitchen at the back of her parents’ section of the apartment, and Cleo’s apartment was always rather dark since it had no exposure except to a tiny backyard overgrown with ailanthus trees that blocked out the light. Cleo always had the lights on, dim ones, which gave a nocturnal atmosphere whatever the time of day. Except for the night when he had met her, Tom had seen Cleo only in close-fitting velvet slacks of various colours and gaily striped silk shirts. They had taken to each other from the very first night, when Cleo had asked him to dinner at her apartment on the following evening. Cleo always asked him up to her apartment, and there was somehow never any thought that he might ask her out to dinner or the theatre or do any of the ordinary things that a young man was expected to do with a girl. She didn’t expect him to bring her flowers or books or candy when he came for dinner or cocktails, though Tom did bring her a little gift sometimes, because it pleased her so. Cleo was the one person he could tell

that he was going to Europe and why. He did.

Cleo was enthralled, as he had known she would be. Her red lips parted in her long, pale face, and she brought her hands down on her velvet thighs and exclaimed, ‘Tommie! How too, too marvellous! It’s just like out of Shakespeare or something!’

That was just what Tom thought, too. That was just what he had needed someone to say.

Cleo fussed around him all evening, asking him if he had this and that, Kleenexes and cold tablets and woollen socks because it started raining in Europe in the fall, and his vaccinations. Tom said he felt pretty well prepared.

‘Just don’t come to see me off, Cleo. I don’t want to be seen off.’

‘Of course not!’ Cleo said, understanding perfectly. ‘Oh, Tommie, I think that’s such fun! Will you write me everything that happens with Dickie? You’re the only person I know who ever went to Europe for a *reason*.’

He told her about visiting Mr Greenleaf’s shipyards in Long Island, the miles and miles of tables with machines making shiny metal parts, varnishing and polishing wood, the dry-docks with boat skeletons of all sizes, and impressed her with the terms Mr Greenleaf had used—coamings, inwales, keelsons, and chines. He described the second dinner at Mr

Greenleaf's house, when Mr Greenleaf had presented him with a wrist-watch. He showed the wrist-watch to Cleo, not a fabulously expensive wrist-watch, but still an excellent one and just the style Tom might have chosen for himself—a plain white face with fine black Roman numerals in a simple gold setting with an alligator strap. 'Just because I happened to say a few days before that I didn't own a watch,' Tom said. 'He's really adopted me like a son.' And Cleo, too, was the only person he knew to whom he could say that.

Cleo sighed. 'Men! You have all the luck. Nothing like that could ever happen to a girl. Men're so free!'

Tom smiled. It often seemed to him that it was the other way around. 'Is that the lamb chops burning?'

Cleo jumped up with a shriek.

After dinner, she showed him five or six of her latest paintings, a couple of romantic portraits of a young man they both knew, in an open-collared white shirt, three imaginary landscapes of a jungle-like land, derived from the view of ailanthus trees out her window. The hair of the little monkeys in the paintings was really astoundingly well done, Tom thought. Cleo had a lot of brushes with just one hair in them, and even these varied from comparatively coarse to ultra fine. They drank nearly two bottles of Medoc

from her parents' liquor shelf, and Tom got so sleepy he could have spent the night right where he was lying on the floor—they had often slept side by side on the two big bear rugs in front of the fireplace, and it was another of the wonderful things about Cleo that she never wanted or expected him to make a pass at her, and he never had—but Tom hauled himself up at a quarter to twelve and took his leave.

'I won't see you again, will I?' Cleo said dejectedly at the door.

'Oh, I should be back in about six weeks,' Tom said, though he didn't think so at all. Suddenly he leaned forward and planted a firm, brotherly kiss on her ivory cheek. 'I'll miss you, Cleo.'

She squeezed his shoulder, the only physical touch he could recall her ever having given him. 'I'll miss you,' she said.

The next day he took care of Mrs Greenleaf's commissions at Brooks Brothers, the dozen pairs of black woollen socks and the bathrobe. Mrs Greenleaf had not suggested a colour for the bathrobe. She would leave that up to him, she had said. Tom chose a dark maroon flannel with a navy-blue belt and lapels. It was not the best-looking robe of the lot, in Tom's opinion, but he felt it was exactly what Richard would have chosen, and that Richard would be delighted with it. He put the socks and the robe on the Greenleafs' charge account. He saw a heavy linen sport shirt with wooden buttons that

he liked very much, that would have been easy to put on the Greenleafs' account, too, but he didn't. He bought it with his own money.

5

THE morning of his sailing, the morning he had looked forward to with such buoyant excitement, got off to a hideous start. Tom followed the steward to his cabin congratulating himself that his firmness with Bob about not wanting to be seen off had taken effect, and had just entered the room when a bloodcurdling whoop went up.

'Where's all the champagne, Tom? We're waiting!'

'Boy, is this a stinking room! Why don't you ask them for something decent?'

'Tommie, take me?' from Ed Martin's girl friend, whom Tom couldn't bear to look at.

There they all were, mostly Bob's lousy friends, sprawled on his bed, on the floor, everywhere. Bob had found out he was sailing, but Tom had never thought he would do a thing like this. It took self-control for Tom not to say in an icy voice, 'There isn't any champagne.' He tried to greet them all, tried to smile, though he could have burst into tears like a child. He gave Bob a long, withering look, but Bob was already high, on something. There were very few things that got under his skin, Tom thought self-justifyingly,