



PATRICIA
HIGHSMITH

RIPLEY
UNDERGROUND

"PATRICIA HIGHSMITH'S NOVELS ARE PEERLESSLY
DISTURBING . . . BAD DREAMS THAT KEEP US
THRASHING FOR THE REST OF THE NIGHT."

—THE NEW YORKER

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PUBLISHED BY W. W. NORTON

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Tales of Natural and Unnatural Catastrophes

Ripley
Under Ground

Patricia Highsmith



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON

To my Polish neighbors, Agnès and Georges
Barylski, my friends of France, 77.

I think I would more readily die for what I do not believe in than for what I hold to be true. . . . Sometimes I think that the artistic life is a long and lovely suicide, and I am not sorry that it is so.

Oscar Wilde in his Personal Letters

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Tom was in the garden when the telephone rang. He let Mme. Annette, his housekeeper, answer it, and went on scraping at the sappy moss that clung to the sides of the stone steps. It was a wet October.

“M. *Tome!*” came Mme. Annette’s soprano voice. “It’s London!”

“Coming,” Tom called. He tossed down the trowel and went up the steps.

The downstairs telephone was in the living room. Tom did not sit down on the yellow satin sofa, because he was in Levi’s.

“Hello, Tom. Jeff Constant. Did you . . .” *Burp.*

“Can you talk louder? It’s a bad connection.”

“Is this better? I can hear you fine.”

People in London always could. “A little.”

“Did you get my letter?”

“No,” Tom said.

“Oh. We’re in trouble. I wanted to warn you. There’s a . . .”

Crackling, a buzz, a dull click, and they were cut off.

“Damn,” Tom said mildly. Warn *him*? Was something wrong at the gallery? With Derwatt Ltd? Warn him? Tom was hardly involved. He had dreamed up the idea of Derwatt Ltd., true, and he derived a little income from it, but— Tom glanced at the telephone, expecting it to ring again at

any moment. Or should he ring Jeff? No, he didn't know if Jeff was at his studio or at the gallery. Jeff Constant was a photographer.

Tom walked toward the French windows that gave onto the back garden. He'd scrape a bit more at the moss, he thought. Tom gardened casually, and he liked spending an hour at it every day, mowing with the push-powered lawnmower, raking and burning twigs, weeding. It was exercise, and he could also daydream. He had hardly resumed with the trowel, when the telephone rang.

Mme. Annette was coming into the living room, carrying a duster. She was short and sturdy, about sixty, and rather jolly. She knew not a word of English and seemed incapable of learning any, even "Good morning," which suited Tom perfectly.

"I'll get it, madame," said Tom, and took the telephone.

"*Hello.*" Jeff's voice said. "Look, Tom, I'm wondering if you could come over. To London, I . . ."

"You what?" It was again a poor connection, but not as bad.

"I said—I've explained it in a letter. I can't explain here. But it's important, Tom."

"Has somebody made a mistake?— Bernard?"

"In a way. There's a man coming from New York, probably tomorrow."

"Who?"

"I explained it in my letter. You know Derwatt's show opens on Tuesday. I'll hold him off till then. Ed and I just won't be available." Jeff sounded quite anxious. "Are you free, Tom?"

"Well—yes." But Tom didn't want to go to London.

"Try to keep it from Heloise. That you're coming to London."

“Heloise is in Greece.”

“Oh, that’s good.” The first hint of relief in Jeff’s voice.

Jeff’s letter came that afternoon at five, express and registered.

104 Charles Place

N.W.8.

Dear Tom,

The new Derwatt show opens on Tuesday, the 15th, his first in two years. Bernard has nineteen new canvases and other pictures will be lent. Now for the bad news.

There is an American named Thomas Murchison, not a dealer but a collector—retired with plenty of lolly. He bought a Derwatt from us three years ago. He compared it with an earlier Derwatt he has just seen in the States, and now he says his is phony. It is, of course, as it is one of Bernard’s. He wrote to the Buckmaster Gallery (to me) saying he thinks the painting he has is not genuine, because the technique and colors belong to a period of five or six years ago in Derwatt’s work. I have the distinct feeling Murchison intends to make a stink here. And what to do about it? You’re always good on ideas, Tom.

Can you come over and talk to us? All expenses paid by the Buckmaster Gallery? We need an injection of confidence more than anything. I don’t think Bernard has messed up any of the new canvases. But Bernard is in a flap, and we don’t want him around even at the opening, especially at the opening.

Please come at once if you can!

Best,

Jeff