



PATRICIA
HIGHSMITH

THE TALENTED
MR. RIPLEY

"[HIGHSMITH] HAS CREATED A WORLD OF
HER OWN—A WORLD CLAUSTROPHOBIC AND
IRRATIONAL WHICH WE ENTER EACH TIME
WITH A SENSE OF PERSONAL DANGER."

—GRAHAM GREENE

The
Talented
Mr Ripley

By

Patricia
Highsmith

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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.