

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 levis.

‘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 towards 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 phoney. 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 colours 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.

P.S. Murchison's letter was courteous, but supposing he's the kind who will insist on looking up Derwatt in Mexico to verify, etc?

The last was a point, Tom thought, because Derwatt didn't exist. The story (invented by Tom) which the Buckmaster Gallery and Derwatt's loyal little band of friends put out, was that Derwatt had gone to a tiny village in Mexico to live, and he saw no one, had no telephone, and forbade the gallery to give his address to anyone. Well, if Murchison went to Mexico, he would have an exhausting search, enough to keep any man busy for a lifetime.

What Tom could see happening was Murchison – who would probably bring his Derwatt painting over – talking to other art dealers and then the press. It could arouse suspicion, and Derwatt might go up in smoke. Would the gang drag him into it? (Tom always thought of the gallery batch, Derwatt's old friends, as 'the gang', though he hated the term every time it came into his head.) And Bernard might mention Tom Ripley, Tom thought, not out of malice but out of his own insane – almost Christlike – honesty.

Tom had kept his name and his reputation clean, amazingly clean, considering all he did. It would be most embarrassing if it

were in the French papers that Thomas Ripley of Villeperce-sur-Seine, husband of Heloise Plisson, daughter of Jacques Plisson, millionaire owner of Pharmaceutiques Plisson, had dreamed up the money-making fraud of Derwatt Ltd, and had for years been deriving a percentage from it, even if it was only ten per cent. It would look exceedingly shabby. Even Heloise, whose morals Tom considered next to non-existent, might react to this, and certainly her father would put the pressure on her (by stopping her allowance) to get a divorce.

Derwatt Ltd was now big, and a collapse would have ramifications. Down would go the lucrative art supply line of materials labelled 'Derwatt', from which the gang, and Tom, got royalties also. Then there was the Derwatt School of Art in Perugia, mainly for nice old ladies and American girls on holiday, but still a source of income, too. The art school got its money not so much from teaching art and selling 'Derwatt' supplies as from acting as a rental agent, finding houses and furnished apartments, of the most expensive order, for well-heeled tourist-students, and taking a cut from it all. The school was run by a pair of English queens, who were not in on the Derwatt hoax.

Tom couldn't make up his mind whether to go to London or not. What could he say to them? And Tom didn't understand the problem: couldn't a painter conceivably return to an earlier technique, for one painting?

'Would m'sieur prefer lamb chops or cold ham this evening?' Mme Annette asked Tom.

'Lamb chops, I think. Thank you. And how is your tooth?' That morning, Mme Annette had been to the village dentist, in whom she had the greatest confidence, for a tooth that had kept her awake all night.

'No pain now. He is so nice, Dr Grenier! He said it was an abscess but he opened the tooth and he said the nerve would fall out.'

Tom nodded, but wondered how a nerve could fall out; gravity, presumably. They'd had to dig hard for one of his nerves once, and in an upper tooth, too.

'You had good news from London?'

'No, well – just a ring from a friend.'

'Any news from Mme Heloise?'

'Not today.'

'Ah, imagine sunlight! Greece!' Mme Annette was wiping the already shining surface of a large oak chest beside the fireplace. 'Look! Villeperce has no sun. The winter has arrived.'

'Yes.' Mme Annette said the same thing every day lately.

Tom didn't expect to see Heloise until close to Christmas. On the other hand, she could turn up unexpectedly – having had a slight but reparable tiff with her friends, or simply having changed her mind about staying on a boat so long. Heloise was impulsive.

Tom put on a Beatles record to lift his spirits, then walked about the large living-room, hands in his pockets. He loved the house. It was a two-storey squarish grey stone house with four turrets over four round rooms in the upstairs corners, making the house look like a little castle. The garden was vast, and even by American standards the place had cost a fortune. Heloise's father had given the house to them three years ago as a wedding present. In the days before he married, Tom had needed some extra money, the Greenleaf money not being enough for him to enjoy the kind of life he had come to prefer, and Tom had been interested in his cut of the Derwatt affair. Now he regretted that. He had accepted ten per cent, when ten per cent had been very little. Even he had not realized that Derwatt would flourish the way it had.

Tom spent that evening as he did most of his evenings, quietly and alone, but his thoughts were troubled. He played the stereo softly while he ate, and he read Servan-Schreiber in French. There were two words Tom didn't know. He would look them up tonight in his Harrap's beside his bed. He was good at holding words in his memory to look up.

After dinner he put on a raincoat, though it wasn't raining, and walked to a little bar-café a quarter of a mile distant. Here he took coffee some evenings, standing at the bar. Invariably the

proprietor Georges inquired about Mme Heloise, and expressed regret that Tom had to spend so much time alone. Tonight Tom said cheerfully:

‘Oh, I am not sure she will stay on that yacht another two months. She will get bored.’

‘*Quel luxe,*’ murmured Georges dreamily. He was a paunchy man with a round face.

Tom mistrusted his mild and unfailing good-humour. His wife Marie, a big energetic brunette who wore bright red lipstick, was frankly tough, but she had a wild happy way of laughing that redeemed her. This was a workman’s bar, and Tom did not object to that fact, but it was not his favourite bar. It just happened to be the closest. At least Georges and Marie had never referred to Dickie Greenleaf. A few people in Paris, acquaintances of his or Heloise’s, had, and so had the owner of the Hotel St Pierre, Villeperce’s only hostelry. The owner had asked, ‘You are perhaps the M. Ripley who was a friend of the American Granelafe?’ Tom had acknowledged that he was. But that had been three years ago, and such a question – if it never went any further – did not make Tom nervous, but he preferred to avoid the subject. The newspapers had said that he had received quite a sum of money, some said a regular income, which was true, from Dickie’s will. At least no newspaper had ever implied that Tom had written the will himself, which he had. The French always remembered financial details.

After his coffee, Tom walked home, saying ‘*Bonsoir*’ to a villager or two on the road, slipping now and then in the sodden leaves that cluttered the edge of the road. There was no sidewalk to mention. He had brought a flashlight, because the streetlights were too infrequent. He caught glimpses of cosy families in kitchens, watching television, sitting around oilcloth-covered tables. Chained dogs barked in a few courtyards. Then he opened the iron gates – ten feet high – of his own house, and his shoes crunched on gravel. Mme Annette’s light was on in her side room, Tom saw from the glow. She had her own television set. Often Tom painted at night, for his amusement only. He knew

he was a bad painter, worse than Dickie. But tonight he was not in the mood. Instead, he wrote to a friend in Hamburg, Reeves Minot, an American, asking when did he expect to need him? Reeves was to plant a microfilm – or something – on a certain Italian Count Bertolozzi. The Count would then visit Tom for a day or so in Villeperce, and Tom would remove the object from the place in the suitcase or wherever, which Reeves would tell him, and post it to a man Tom didn't know at all in Paris. Tom frequently performed these fence-like services, sometimes for jewellery thefts. It was easier if Tom removed the objects from his guests, than if someone tried to do the same thing in a Paris hotel room, when the carrier was not in. Tom knew Count Bertolozzi slightly from a recent trip to Milan, when Reeves, who lived in Hamburg, had been in Milan also. Tom had discussed paintings with the Count. It was usually easy for Tom to persuade people with a bit of leisure to stay with him a day or so in Villeperce and look at his paintings – he had, besides Derwatts, a Soutine, of whose work Tom was especially fond, a Van Gogh, two Magrittes, and drawings by Cocteau and Picasso, and many drawings of less famous painters which he thought equally good or better. Villeperce was near Paris, and it was nice for his guests to enjoy a bit of country before going up. In fact, Tom often fetched them from Orly in his car, Villeperce being some forty miles south of Orly. Only once had Tom failed, when an American guest had become immediately ill in Tom's house from something he must have eaten before arriving, and Tom had not been able to get to his suitcase because the guest was constantly in bed and awake in his room. That object another microfilm of some sort – had been recovered with difficulty by a Reeves man in Paris. Tom could not understand the value of some of these things, but neither could he always when he read spy novels, and Reeves was only a fence himself and took a percentage. Tom always drove to another town to post these things, and he always sent them with a false return name and address.

That night, Tom could not fall asleep, so he got out of bed, put on his purple woollen dressing-gown – new and thick, full

of military frogs and tassels, a birthday present from Heloise – and went down to the kitchen. He had thought of taking up a bottle of Super Valstar beer, but decided to make some tea. He almost never drank tea, so in a way it was appropriate, as he felt it was a strange night. He tiptoed around the kitchen, so as not to awake Mme Annette. The tea Tom made was dark red. He had put too much in the pot. He carried a tray into the living-room, poured a cup, and walked about, noiseless in felt house-shoes. Why not impersonate Derwatt, he thought. My God, yes! That was the solution, the perfect solution, and the only solution.

Derwatt was about his age, close enough – Tom was thirty-one and Derwatt would be about thirty-five. Blue-grey eyes, Tom remembered Cynthia (Bernard's girl friend) or maybe Bernard saying in one of their gushing descriptions of Derwatt the Untarnishable. Derwatt had had a short beard, which was a tremendous help, would be, for Tom.

Jeff Constant would surely be pleased with the idea. A press interview. Tom must brush up on the questions he might have to answer, and the stories he would have to tell. Was Derwatt as tall as he? Well, who among the press would know? Derwatt's hair had been darker, Tom thought. But that could be fixed. Tom drank more tea. He continued walking about the room. His should be a surprise appearance, a surprise presumably even to Jeff and Ed – and Bernard, of course. Or so they would tell the press.

Tom tried to imagine confronting Mr Thomas Murchison. Be calm, self-assured, that was the essence. If Derwatt said a picture was his own, that he had painted it, who was Murchison to say him nay?

On a crest of enthusiasm, Tom went to his telephone. Often the operators were asleep at this hour – 2 a.m. and a bit after – and took ten minutes to answer. Tom sat patiently on the edge of the yellow sofa. He was thinking that Jeff or somebody would have to get some very good make-up in readiness. Tom wished he could count on a girl, Cynthia for instance, to supervise it,

but Cynthia and Bernard had broken up two or three years ago. Cynthia knew the score about Derwatt and Bernard's forgeries, and would have none of it, not a penny of the profits, Tom remembered.

'*Allo, j'écoute*', said the female operator in an annoyed tone, as if Tom had got her out of bed to do him a favour. Tom gave the number of Jeff's studio, which he had in an address book by the telephone. Tom was rather lucky, and the call came through in five minutes. He pulled his third cup of filthy tea nearer the telephone.

'Hello, Jeff. Tom. How are things?'

'Not any better. Ed's here. We were just thinking of ringing you. Are you coming over?'

'Yes, and I have a better idea. How about my playing – our missing friend – for a few hours, anyway?'

Jeff took an instant to comprehend. 'Oh, Tom, great! Can you be here for Tuesday?'

'Yes, sure.'

'Can you make it Monday. The day after tomorrow?'

'I don't think I can. But Tuesday, yes. Now listen, Jeff, the make-up – it's got to be good.'

'Don't worry! Just a sec!' He left off to speak with Ed, then returned. 'Ed says he has a source – of supply.'

'Don't announce it to the public,' Tom continued in his calm voice, because Jeff sounded as if he were leaping off his feet with joy. 'And another thing, if it doesn't work, if I fail – we must say it's a joke a friend of yours dreamed up – me. That it has nothing to do with – you know.' Tom meant with validating Murchison's forgery, but Jeff grasped this at once.

'Ed wants to say a word.'

'Hello, Tom,' Ed's deeper voice said. 'We're delighted you're coming over. It's a marvellous idea. And you know – Bernard's got some of his clothes and things.'

'I'll leave that to you.' Tom felt suddenly alarmed. 'The clothes are the least. It's the face. Get cracking, will you?'

'Right you are. Bless you.'

They hung up. Then Tom slumped back on the sofa and relaxed, almost horizontal. No, he wouldn't go to London too soon. Go on stage at the last moment, with dash and momentum. Too much briefing and rehearsal could be a bad thing.

Tom got up with the cold cup of tea. It would be amusing and funny if he could bring it off, he thought, as he stared at the Derwatt over his fireplace. This was a pinkish picture of a man in a chair, a man with several outlines, so it seemed one was looking at the picture through someone else's distorting eye-glasses. Some people said Derwatts hurt their eyes. But from a distance of three or four yards, they didn't. This was not a genuine Derwatt, but an early Bernard Tufts forgery. Across the room hung a genuine Derwatt, 'The Red Chairs'. Two little girls sat side by side, looking terrified, as if it were their first day in school, or as if they were listening to something frightening in church. 'The Red Chairs' was eight or nine years old. Behind the little girls, wherever they were sitting, the whole place was on fire. Yellow and red flames leapt about, hazed by touches of white, so that the fire didn't immediately catch the attention of the beholder. But when it did, the emotional effect was shattering. Tom loved both pictures. By now he had almost forgotten to remember, when he looked at them, that one was a forgery and the other genuine.

Tom recalled the early amorphous days of what was now Derwatt Ltd. Tom had met Jeffrey Constant and Bernard Tufts in London just after Derwatt had drowned – presumably intentionally – in Greece. Tom had just returned from Greece himself; it was not long after Dickie Greenleaf's death. Derwatt's body had never been found, but some fishermen of the village said they had seen him go swimming one morning, and had not seen him return. Derwatt's friends – and Tom had met Cynthia Gradnor on the same visit – had been profoundly disturbed, affected in a way that Tom had never seen after a death, not even in a family. Jeff, Ed, Cynthia, Bernard had been dazed. They had spoken dreamily, passionately, of Derwatt not only as an artist but as a friend, and as a human being. He had lived simply, in Islington, eating badly at times, but he had always been generous

to others. Children in his neighbourhood had adored him, and had sat for him without expecting any payment, but Derwatt had always reached in his pockets for what were perhaps his last pennies to give them. Then just before he had gone to Greece, Derwatt had had a disappointment. He had painted a mural on a government assignment for a post office in a town in the north of England. It had been approved in sketch form, but rejected when finished: somebody was nude in it, or too nude, and Derwatt had refused to change it. ('And he was right, of course!' Derwatt's loyal friends had assured Tom.) But this had deprived Derwatt of a thousand pounds that he had counted on. It seemed to have been a last straw in a series of disappointments – the depth of which Derwatt's friends had not realized, and for this they reproached themselves. There had been a woman in the picture too, Tom recalled vaguely, the cause of another disappointment to Derwatt, but it seemed that the woman was not so important to him as his work disappointments. All Derwatt's friends were professionals also, mostly freelance, and were quite busy, and in the last days when Derwatt had called on them – not for money but for company on several evenings – they had said they hadn't time to see him. Unbeknownst to his friends, Derwatt had sold what furniture he had in his studio and got himself to Greece where he had written a long and depressed letter to Bernard. (Tom had never seen the letter.) Then had come the news of his disappearance or death.

The first thing Derwatt's friends, including Cynthia, had done was gather all his paintings and drawings and try to sell them. They had wanted to keep his name alive, had wanted the world to know and appreciate what he had done. Derwatt had had no relatives, and as Tom recalled, he had been a foundling without even known parents. The legend of his tragic death had helped instead of hindered; usually galleries were uninterested in paintings by a young and unknown artist who was already dead – but Edmund Banbury, a freelance journalist, had used his entrées and his talent for articles on Derwatt in newspapers, colour supplements and art magazines, and Jeffrey Constant had made

photographs of Derwatt's paintings to illustrate them. Within a few months of Derwatt's death they found a gallery, the Buckmaster Gallery and moreover in Bond Street, which was willing to handle his work, and soon Derwatt's canvases were selling for six and eight hundred pounds.

Then had come the inevitable. The paintings were all sold, or nearly, and this was when Tom had been living in London (he had lived for two years in a flat in S.W.1, near Eaton Square) and had run into Jeff and Ed and Bernard one night in the Salisbury pub. They had again been sad, because Derwatt's paintings were coming to an end, and it had been Tom who had said, 'You're doing so well, it's a shame to end like this. Can't Bernard knock off a few paintings in Derwatt's style?' Tom had meant it as a joke, or a half-joke. He hardly knew the trio, only knew that Bernard was a painter. But Jeff, a practical type like Ed Banbury (and not a bit like Bernard), had turned to Bernard and said, 'I've thought of that, too. What do you think, Bernard?' Tom had forgot Bernard's exact reply, but he remembered that Bernard had lowered his head as if in shame or plain terror at the idea of falsifying his idol, Derwatt. Months later, Tom had encountered Ed Banbury in a street in London, and Ed had said cheerfully that Bernard had brought off two excellent 'Derwatts' and they had sold one at the Buckmaster as genuine.

Then still later, just after Tom had married Heloise, and was no longer living in London, Tom, Heloise, and Jeff were at the same party, a large cocktail party of the kind where you never meet or even see the host, and Jeff had beckoned Tom into a corner.

Jeff had said, 'Can we meet somewhere later? This is my address,' handing Tom a card. 'Can you come round about eleven tonight?'

So Tom had gone to Jeff's alone, which had been simple, because Heloise – who at that time did not speak much English – had had enough after the cocktail party, and wanted to go back to their hotel. Heloise loved London – English sweaters and Carnaby Street, and the shops that sold Union Jack wastebaskets

and signs that said things like ‘Piss off’, things that Tom often had to translate for her, but she said her head ached after trying to speak English for an hour.

‘Our problem is,’ Jeff had said that night, ‘we can’t go on pretending we’ve found another Derwatt somewhere. Bernard is doing fine but – Do you think we could dare dig up a big trove of Derwatts somewhere, like Ireland where he painted for a bit, and sell them and then call it quits? Bernard isn’t keen about going on. He feels he’s betraying Derwatt – in a way.’

Tom had reflected a moment, then said, ‘What’s the matter with Derwatt being still alive somewhere? A recluse somewhere, sending his paintings to London? That is, if Bernard can keep going.’

‘Um-m. Well – yes. Greece, maybe. What a super idea, Tom! It can go on for ever!’

‘How about Mexico? I think it’s safer than Greece. Let’s say Derwatt’s living in some little village. He won’t tell anyone the name of the village – except maybe you and Ed and Cynthia – ’

‘Not Cynthia, She’s – Well, Bernard doesn’t see much of her any more. Consequently neither do we. Just as well she doesn’t know too much about this.’

Jeff had rung up Ed that night to tell him the idea, Tom recalled.

‘It’s just an idea,’ Tom had said. ‘I don’t know if it’ll work.’

But it had worked. Derwatt’s paintings had begun coming from Mexico, it was said, and the dramatic story of Derwatt’s ‘resurrection’ had been exploited to advantage by Ed Banbury and Jeff Constant in more magazine articles, with photographs of Derwatt and his (Bernard’s) latest paintings, though not of Derwatt himself *in* Mexico, because Derwatt permitted no interviewers or photographers. The paintings were sent from Vera Cruz and not even Jeff or Ed knew the name of his village. Derwatt was perhaps mentally sick to be such a recluse. His paintings were sick and depressed, according to some critics. But were now among the highest priced paintings of any living artist in England or on the Continent or in America. Ed Banbury wrote to Tom in

France, offering him ten per cent of the profits, the loyal little group (now numbering only three, Bernard, Jeff and Ed) being the sole beneficiaries of Derwatt's sales. Tom had accepted, mainly because he considered it, his acceptance, rather a guarantee of his silence about the duplicity. But Bernard Tufts was painting like a demon.

Jeff and Ed bought the Buckmaster Gallery. Tom was not sure if Bernard owned any part of it. Several Derwatts were in a permanent collection of the gallery, and the gallery showed the paintings of other artists as well, of course. This was more Jeff's job than Ed's, and Jeff had hired an assistant, a sort of manager for the gallery. But this step up, the purchase of the Buckmaster Gallery, had come after Jeff and Ed had been approached by an art materials manufacturer called George Janopolos or some such, who wanted to start a line of goods to be labelled 'Derwatt', which would include everything from erasers to oil paint sets, and for which he offered Derwatt a royalty of one per cent. Ed and Jeff had decided to accept for Derwatt (presumably with Derwatt's consent). A company had then been formed called Derwatt Ltd.

All this Tom recollected at four in the morning, shivering a little despite his princely dressing-gown. Mme Annette always thriftily turned the central heating down at night. He held the cup of cold sweet tea between his hands and stared unseeing at a photograph of Heloise – long blonde hair on either side of a slender face, a pleasant and meaningless design to Tom just now rather than a face – and he thought of Bernard working in secret on his Derwatt forgeries in a closed, even locked room in his studio apartment. Bernard's place was pretty crummy, as it always had been. Tom had never seen the sanctum sanctorum where he painted his masterpieces, the Derwatts that brought in thousands of quid. If one painted more forgeries than one's own paintings, wouldn't the forgeries become more natural, more real, more genuine to oneself, even, than one's own painting? Wouldn't the effort finally go out of it and the work become second nature?

At last Tom curled up on the yellow sofa, slippers off and feet drawn under his robe, and slept. He did not sleep long before Mme Annette arrived and awaked him with a shriek, or a shrill gasp, of surprise.

‘I must have fallen asleep reading,’ Tom said, smiling, sitting up.

Mme Annette hurried off to make his coffee.

2

Tom booked a flight to London at noon on Tuesday. It would give him only a couple of hours to get made-up and to be briefed. Not enough time to grow nervous. Tom drove to Melun to pick up some cash – francs – at his bank.

It was eleven-forty, and the bank closed at twelve. Tom was third in the queue at the window where people received cash, but unfortunately a woman was delivering payroll money or some such at this window, heaving up bags of coins, while keeping her feet braced against the bags that remained on the floor. Behind the grille, a clerk with wetted thumb was counting stacks of banknotes as quickly as possible and making notations of their sums on two separate papers. How long would this go on, Tom wondered, as the clock crept towards twelve. Tom watched with amusement as the queue broke up. Three men now and two women pressed near the grille, staring glassy-eyed, like fascinated snakes, at all the dough, as if it were a heritage left them by a relative who had worked a lifetime for it. Tom gave it up and left the bank. He could manage without the cash, he thought, and in fact he had only been thinking of giving it or selling it to English friends who might be coming to France.

On Tuesday morning, when Tom was packing his bag, Mme Annette knocked on his bedroom door. ‘I’m off for Munich,’ Tom said cheerily. ‘There’s a concert.’

‘Ah, Munich! Bavière! You must take warm clothing,’ Mme

Annette was used to his impromptu trips. 'For how long, M. Tome?'

'Two days, maybe three. Don't worry about messages. I may ring to see if any have come.'

Then Tom thought of something possibly useful, a Mexican ring that he had – he thought – in his studbox. Yes, there it was, among cufflinks and buttons, a heavy ring of silver whose design was two coiled snakes. Tom disliked it and had forgot how he acquired it, but at least it was Mexican. Tom blew on it, rubbed it against a trouser leg, and pocketed it.

The post at 10.30 A.M. brought three items, a telephone bill, lumpy in its envelope because of separate tabs for each non-Villeperce call; a letter from Heloise; and an American airmail letter addressed in a hand Tom didn't know. He turned the envelope over and was surprised to see the name Christopher Greenleaf on the back with a San Francisco return address. Who was Christopher? He opened Heloise's letter first.

11 octobre 19—

Chéri,

I am happy and very quite now. Very good repastes. We catch fishes off the boat. Zeppo sends love. [Zeppo was her swarthy Greek host and Tom could tell him what to do with his love.]

I learn better to mount a bicycle. We have made many voyages into the land which is dry. Zeppo makes photos. How goes it at Belle Ombre? I miss you. Are you happy? Many invites? [Did that mean guests or invitations?] Are you painting? I have received no word from Papa.

Kiss Mme A. I embrace you.

The rest was in French. She wanted him to send a red bathing-suit which he would find in a small *commode* in her bathroom. He should send it airmail. The yacht had a heated swimming-pool. Tom at once went upstairs where Mme Annette was still working in his room, and entrusted this task to her, giving her a hundred-franc note for it, because he thought she might be

scandalized at the price of the airmail package and be tempted to send it slow post.

Then he went down and opened the Greenleaf letter hastily, because he had to leave for Orly in a few minutes.

Oct. 12 19—

Dear Mr Ripley,

I am a cousin of Dickie's and am coming to Europe next week, probably going to London first, though I cannot make up my mind whether to go to Paris first. Anyway, I thought it would be nice if we could meet. My uncle Herbert gave me your address, and he says you are not far from Paris. Haven't got your telephone number, but I can look it up.

To tell you a bit about myself, I am twenty and I go to Stanford University. I spent one year in military service, during which my college was interrupted. I'll return to Stanford for a degree in engineering but meanwhile I am taking a year off to see Europe and relax. Lots of fellows do this now. The pressure everywhere is quite something. I mean in America, but maybe you have been in Europe so long you don't know what I mean.

My uncle has told me a lot about you. He says you were a good friend of Dickie's. I met Dickie when I was 11 and he was 21. I remember a tall blond fellow. He visited my family in California.

Please tell me if you will be in Villeperce in late October, early November. Meanwhile here's hoping to meet you.

Sincerely

Chris Greenleaf

He would get out of that one politely, Tom thought. No use making closer contact with the Greenleaf family. Once in a blue moon Herbert Greenleaf wrote him, and Tom always replied, nice polite letters.

'Mme Annette, keep the home fires burning,' Tom said as he took off.

'What did you say?'

He translated it into French as best he could.

'Au revoir, M. Tome! Bon voyage!' Mme Annette waved to him from the front door.

Tom took the red Alfa-Romeo, one of the two cars in the garage. At Orly, he put the car in the indoor garage, saying it was for two or three days. He bought a bottle of whisky in the terminus to take to the gang. He had already a big bottle of Pernod in his suitcase (since he was permitted to enter London with only one bottle), because Tom had found that if he went through the green aisle and showed the visible bottle, the inspector never asked him to open his suitcase. On the plane he bought untipped Gauloises, always popular in London.

It was raining lightly in England. The bus crept along on the left side of the road, past the family houses whose names always amused Tom, though now he could hardly read them through the murk. Bide-a-wee. Unbelievable. Milford Haven. Dun Wandering. They hung on little signboards. Inglenook. Sit-Ye-Doon. Good God. Then came the stretch of jammed-together Victorian houses that had been converted into small hotels with grandiose names in neon lights between Doric doorway pillars: Manchester Arms, King Alfred, Cheshire House. Tom knew that behind the genteel respectability of those narrow lobbies some of the best murderers of the present day took refuge for a night or so, looking equally respectable themselves. England was England, God bless it!

The next thing that caught Tom's attention was a poster on a lamppost on the left side of the road. DERWATT was written in bold black script slanting downward – Derwatt's signature and the picture reproduced in colour looked in the dim light dark purple or black and somewhat resembled the raised top of a grand piano. A new Bernard Tufts forgery, doubtless. There was another such poster a few yards on. It was odd to feel so 'announced' all over London, and to arrive so quietly, Tom thought as he stepped down from the bus at the West Kensington Terminal unnoticed by anyone.

From the terminal, Tom rang Jeff Constant at his studio. Ed Banbury answered.

‘Hop in a taxi and come straight here!’ Ed said, sounding wildly happy.

Jeff’s studio was in St John’s Wood. Second floor – first to the English – on the left. It was a proper neat little building, neither swank nor shabby.

Ed whipped the door open. ‘My God, Tom, it’s great to see you!’

They shook hands firmly. Ed was taller than Tom with lank blond hair that was apt to fall over his ears, so he was constantly shoving it aside. He was about thirty-five.

‘And where’s Jeff?’ Tom fished out Gauloises and whisky from the red net bag, then the smuggled Pernod from his suitcase. ‘For the house.’

‘Oh, super! Jeff’s at the gallery. Listen, Tom, you’ll *do* it? – Because I’ve got the stuff here and there isn’t too much time.’

‘I’ll try it,’ Tom said.

‘Bernard’s due. He’ll help us. Briefing.’ Ed looked hectically at his wristwatch.

Tom had removed his topcoat and jacket. ‘Can’t Derwatt be a little late? Isn’t the opening at five?’

‘Oh, of course. No need to get there till six, anyway, but I do want to try the make-up. Jeff said to remind you you’re not much shorter than Derwatt was – and who remembers those statistics? Assuming I ever wrote them anywhere? And Derwatt had bluish-grey eyes. But yours’ll do.’ Ed laughed. ‘Want some tea?’

‘No thanks.’ Tom was looking at the dark-blue suit on Jeff’s couch. It looked too wide, and it was unpressed. A pair of awful black shoes were on the floor by the couch. ‘Why don’t you have a drink?’ Tom suggested to Ed, because Ed looked as jumpy as a cat. As usual, another person’s nervousness was making Tom feel calm.

The doorbell rang.

Ed let Bernard Tufts in.

Tom extended a hand. ‘Bernard, how are you?’

‘All right, thank you,’ Bernard said, sounding miserable. Bernard was thin and olive-skinned, with straight black hair and gentle dark eyes.

Tom thought it best not to try to talk to Bernard just now, but to be simply efficient.

Ed drew a basin of water in Jeff’s tiny but modern bathroom, and Tom submitted to a hair rinse to make his hair darker. Bernard began to talk, but only after deliberate, then more importunate prodding from Ed.

‘He walked with a slight stoop,’ Bernard said. ‘His voice – He was a little shy in public. It was a sort of monotone, I suppose. Like this, if I can illustrate,’ Bernard said in a monotone. ‘Now and then he laughed.’

‘Don’t we all!’ Tom said, laughing nervously himself. Now Tom was sitting in a straight chair, being combed by Ed. On Tom’s right was a platter of what looked like barbershop floor sweepings, but Ed shook this out, and it was a beard fastened to fine flesh-coloured gauze. ‘Good God, I hope the lights are dim,’ Tom murmured.

‘We’ll see to that,’ said Ed.

While Ed worked with a moustache, Tom pulled off his two rings, one a wedding ring, one Dickie Greenleaf’s ring, and pocketed them. He asked Bernard to bring him the ring from his left trouser pocket, and Bernard did. Bernard’s thin fingers were cold and shaking. Tom wanted to ask him how Cynthia was, and remembered that Bernard was not seeing her any more. They had been going to marry, Tom remembered. Ed was snipping at Tom’s hair with scissors, creating a bush in front.

‘And Derwatt –’ Bernard stopped, because his voice had cracked.

‘Oh, shut up, Bernard!’ Ed said, laughing hysterically.

Bernard laughed also. ‘Sorry. Really, I’m sorry.’ He sounded contrite, as if he meant it.

The beard was going on, with glue.

Ed said, ‘I want you to walk around a bit here, Tom. Get used to it. At the gallery – You won’t have to go in with the crowd,