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Those Who Walk Away

Written by Patricia Highsmith

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THOSE WHO
WALK AWAY

Patricia Highsmith

Introduced by Joan Schenkar



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I

Coleman was saying, 'She had no brothers or sisters. Makes things a little easier, I suppose.'

Ray walked with his bare head hanging, hands deep in the pockets of his overcoat. He shivered. The night air of Rome was sharp with coming winter. It didn't make things easier, Ray thought, that Peggy had had no brothers or sisters. It certainly didn't make things easier for Coleman. It was dark in the street where they walked. Ray lifted his head to see a street sign, and found none. 'You know where we're going?' he asked Coleman.

'There'll be taxis down here,' Coleman said, nodding ahead.

The pavement slanted downward. The sound of their footfalls grew higher pitched as their shoes slid a little. *Scrape-scrape-scrapety-scrape*. Ray took hardly more than one step to Coleman's two. Coleman was short and had a quick, choppy gait that was at the same time rolling. Now and again a whiff of Coleman's cigar, which Coleman held between his front teeth, blew past Ray's nostrils, bitter and black. The restaurant Coleman had wanted to go to had not been worth crossing Rome for, Ray thought. He had met Coleman by appointment at eight o'clock in the Caffé Greco. Coleman had said he was to meet a man – what was the

name? – in the restaurant, but the man had not arrived. Coleman had not mentioned him once they got there, and Ray wondered now if the man existed. Coleman was odd. Perhaps Coleman had dined or lunched at the restaurant a few times with Peggy, and liked the place for his memories. Coleman had spoken mainly of Peggy in the restaurant, not as resentfully as he had in Mallorca, even chuckling a little tonight. But the grimness, the question, was still in Coleman's eyes. And Ray had got nowhere, trying to talk to him. The evening, for Ray, was simply another evening washing over him. The evening had the atmosphere of others in Mallorca in the ten days since Peggy had died – colourless, muffled somehow from the rest of the world, evenings of food eaten or half eaten simply because it arrived on the table.

'You're going on to New York,' said Coleman.

'Paris first.'

'Any business here?'

'Well, yes. But nothing I can't do in two days.' Ray was going to see some painters in Rome, see if they were interested in being represented by his gallery in New York. The gallery did not exist as yet. He had made no telephone calls today, though he had been in Rome since noon. He sighed, and knew that he had no heart for meeting painters, for convincing them that the Garrett Gallery was going to be a success.

Viale Pola, Ray read on a street sign. A larger avenue lay ahead. Ray thought it should be the Nomentana.

Ray was vaguely aware of Coleman tugging in his pocket for something. Then Coleman faced him suddenly and a shot exploded between them, rocking Ray back against a hedge, making his ears ring, so that for a few seconds he could not hear Coleman's running feet on the pavement. Coleman was out of sight, Ray did not know if a bullet had knocked him backward, or if he had fallen back with surprise.

'Che cosa?' yelled a man's voice from a window.

Ray gasped for air, realized he had been holding his breath, then struggled forward, off the hedge on to his feet. 'Niente,' he called back automatically. When he breathed deeply, nothing hurt. He decided he was not hit. He began to walk in the direction Coleman had taken, the direction in which they had been walking.

'That's the man!'

'What happened?'

The voices faded as Ray entered the Nomentana.

He was lucky. A taxi approached immediately from the left. Ray hailed it.

'Albergo Mediterraneo,' he said, and sank back in the seat. He felt a sting, a burning sensation in his left upper arm. He lifted the arm. It certainly hadn't gone through the bone. He touched the sleeve of his coat, and a finger caught in the hole in it. Further exploration, and he found the exit hole on the other side of the sleeve. And now there was a warm wetness in the hollow of his arm where the blood ran.

At the Mediterraneo – a modern hotel whose style did not appeal to Ray, but his favourite hotels had been full today – he claimed his key and rode up with the bellhop, left hand in his coat pocket so no blood would drip on the carpet. The closing of his own room door brought a sense of safety, though Ray found himself glancing in corners after he turned the light on, as if he expected to see Coleman in one of them.

He went into the bathroom, removed his overcoat and tossed it into the bedroom on the bed, then removed his jacket, revealing a splotched streak of blood down his blue-and-white striped shirt-sleeve. Off came the shirt.

The wound was a tiny scallop, hardly half an inch long, a classic graze. He wet a clean face towel and washed it. Ray got a Band-Aid from a suitcase pocket, remembering that this broad Band-Aid had been the only one left in the tin box when he had

been clearing out the medicine cabinet in Mallorca. Then, using his teeth, he tied a handkerchief around his arm. He soaked the shirt in a basin of cold water.

Five minutes later, in pyjamas, Ray ordered a double Dewar's from the bar. He tipped the small boy well. Then he turned his light out and went to the window with his drink. He was on a rather high floor. Rome looked wide and low, except for the distant, sturdy dome of St Peter's and column of Santa Trinità at the top of the Spanish Steps. Coleman might think he was dead, Ray thought, from the way he had fallen back into the hedge. Coleman had not looked back. Ray smiled a little, though his brows frowned. Where had Coleman acquired the gun? And when?

Coleman was leaving on a noon plane tomorrow for Venice. Inez and Antonio were going with him, Coleman had said tonight. Coleman said he wanted a change of scene, something beautiful, and that Venice was the best place he could think of. Ray wondered if Coleman would ring tomorrow morning to see if he'd got back to his hotel or not? If the hotel said, 'Yes, Mr Garrett is in,' would Coleman hang up? And if Coleman believed he had killed him, what would Coleman say to Inez? 'I left Ray near the Nomentana. We were taking different taxis. I don't know who could've done it.' Or had Coleman not said he was having dinner with him, but said he was dining with someone else? Would Coleman have got rid of the gun immediately, tonight, dropped it into the Tiber from a bridge?

Ray took a longer pull on the drink. Coleman wouldn't ring his hotel. Coleman simply wouldn't bother. And if he was challenged, Coleman would lie and lie well.

And Coleman would, of course, find out that he was still alive, simply because there would be nothing in the papers about his being dead, or seriously wounded. And if Ray were then in Paris or New York, it would seem to Coleman that he had fled, run

from him in a cowardly way before everything could be explained, labelled, analysed. Ray knew that he would go to Venice. He knew that there would be more conversations.

The drink helped. Ray felt suddenly relaxed and tired. He stared at his big open suitcase on the rack. He had packed intelligently in Mallorca, not forgetting cuff-links, drawing-pad, his fountain-drawing-pen, address books. The rest of his things, two trunks, several cartons, he had shipped to Paris. Why Paris and not New York, he didn't know, since in Paris he'd only have to get them sent on to New York. It was not an efficient arrangement, but under the rattling circumstances in which he had packed in Mallorca, it amazed him that he had done as well as he had. Coleman had come down from Rome the day before the funeral and had stayed three days afterwards; and during those days Ray had packed up his things and Peggy's, settled bills with tradesmen, written letters, seen about cancelling the lease with his landlord Dekkard, who had been in Madrid, so that the thing had had to be done by telephone. And all the while Coleman had prowled about the house, stunned, rather silent; yet Ray had seen his thin mouth becoming smaller and straighter as he began to build and harden his wrath against Ray. Once, Ray remembered, he had come into the living-room to ask Coleman something (Coleman had slept on the living-room sofa, declining the guest room he might have had) and found Coleman holding a terracotta lampbase shaped like a large gourd in both hands; and Ray had thought for a moment that Coleman was going to hurl it at him, but Coleman had set it down. Ray had asked Coleman if he wanted to drive to Palma, forty kilometres away, because he had to go in to see about shipping his things. Coleman had said no. The next day, Coleman had taken a plane from Palma and flown back to Rome to Inez, his current woman. Ray had not met her. She had telephoned Coleman twice when Coleman was in Mallorca. Coleman had been summoned to the post office to take

the calls, as there was no telephone in the house. Coleman always had women, though Ray could not understand what charm he had for them.

Ray slid carefully into bed, not wanting to encourage more bleeding from his arm. It was annoying that Coleman would be in the company of Inez and the Italian Antonio. Ray had never seen Antonio, but could imagine the type – weak, good-looking and young, neatly dressed, moneyless, a hanger-on now though probably a former boy-friend of Inez. And Inez would be in her forties, perhaps a widow, moneyed, maybe a painter herself, a bad one. But perhaps in Venice, if he saw Coleman alone again just once, he could say it all plainly in words – say the plain fact that he didn't know why Peggy had killed herself, that he honestly couldn't explain it. If he could make Coleman believe that, instead of believing that he, Ray, was keeping some vital fact or secret from him, then – Then what? Ray's mind refused to tackle the problem any longer. He fell asleep.

The next morning he arranged for a night flight to Venice, sent a telegram to reserve a room in the Pensione Seguso on the Zattere quay, and made four telephone calls to painters and art galleries in Rome, which netted him two appointments. From these, he secured one painter for the future Garrett Gallery, a certain Guglielmo Guardini, who painted fantastic landscapes in great detail with fine brushes. The arrangement was a verbal one, nothing was signed, but Ray felt cheered by it. He and Bruce might not, after all, have to start the Gallery of Bad Art in New York. This had been Ray's idea as a last resort, if they couldn't get any good painters, get the worst, and people would come to laugh and stay to buy, in order to have something different from other people who collected only 'the best'. 'All we'll have to do is sit and wait,' Bruce had said. 'Take only the worst, and don't explain what you're doing. We don't have to call it the Gallery of Bad Art. Call it Gallery Zero, for instance. The public'll soon get the

idea.' They had laughed, talking about it in Mallorca when Bruce had come to stay last summer. And maybe the idea was not at all impossible; but Ray was glad, that evening in Rome, to be on a soberer track with the painter Guardini.

When he fetched his suitcase at his hotel after his solitary dinner, no telephone call had come for him.

The others had arrived first, at least ten hours before him, Ray thought. The plane unloaded its passengers into chilly darkness at 3.30 a.m., and Ray learned that there were no buses at this hour, only boats.

The boat was a good-sized launch, and it rapidly filled with silent, solemn English and blond Scandinavians who had been waiting when Ray's plane landed. The launch backed from the pier, turned smartly, dropped its stern like a charging horse, and shot away at full speed. Cheerful piano music, such as one might have expected in a cocktail lounge, came softly from the loud-speaker, but did not seem to lift anyone's spirits. Speechless, white-faced, everyone faced front as if the boat were rushing them to their execution. The launch deposited them at the Alitalia air terminal pier near the San Marco stop from which Ray hoped to take a vaporetto – his destination was the Accademia stop – but before he realized what was happening, his suitcase was on a trolley and being pushed into the Alitalia building. Ray ran after it, was checked by a jam of people at the doorway, and when he got inside, his suitcase was not in sight. He had to wait at a counter, while two busy porters tried to obey the shouts of fifty travellers

and hand them their proper luggage. When Ray got his, and walked out of the building with it, a vaporetto was just pulling away from the San Marco stop.

That meant a long wait, probably, but he did not particularly care.

'Where are you going, sir? I'll carry it for you,' said a husky porter in faded blue, reaching for his suitcase.

'Accademia.'

'Ah, you just missed a vaporetto.' A smile. 'Another forty-five minutes. Pensione Seguso?'

'Si,' said Ray.

'I will accompany you. Mille lire.'

'Grazie. It is not a long walk from Accademia.'

'A ten-minute walk.'

It was certainly not, but Ray waved him away with a smile. He walked to the San Marco pier, on to the creaking, swaying dock, and lit a cigarette. There was nothing moving at the moment on the water. The big church of Santa Maria della Salute on the opposite bank of the canal was only palely lit, as perfunctorily as the street-lights seemed lit, Ray felt, because November wasn't the tourist season. The water lapped gently but powerfully against the stanchions of the pier. Ray thought of Coleman, Inez and Antonio asleep somewhere in Venice. Coleman and Inez might be in the same bed, perhaps in the Gritti or the Danieli, since Inez would be paying the bills. (Coleman had let him know she was wealthy.) Antonio, though probably financed on this trip by Inez, too, would be in a cheaper place.

Two Italian men, well dressed, carrying brief-cases, joined him on the pier. They were talking about expanding a garage somewhere. Their presence and their conversation were somehow comforting to Ray; but still he shivered, and glanced around hopefully for the second time for a coffee-bar, and saw none. Harry's Bar looked like a grey glass-and-stone tomb. And not a

window was lighted in the red façade of the Hotel Monaco e Grand Canal opposite it. Ray walked in small circles around his suitcase.

At last the vaporetto emerged from a dark curve of canal far to the left, a little blaze of welcome, yellowish light. It slowed to touch at a stop before San Marco. Ray, like the two Italians, stared at it as if fascinated. The boat drew large and close, until Ray could see the five or six passengers on it, and could see the calm, handsome face of the man in the white yachting cap who would fling the mooring rope. On the boat, Ray bought a ticket for himself and a fifty-lire ticket for his suitcase. The boat passed della Salute, and entered the narrower mouth of the Grand Canal. The Gritti Palace's lights were elegant and discreet: two softly lighted electric lanterns held aloft by oversized female statues at the water's edge. Boats arriving at the Gritti would dock between them. Motor-boats under canvas covers bobbed between poles. Their names were *Ca' Corner* and *Aldebaran*. The colour everywhere was black, the rare lights only small yellow splotches against it, sometimes revealing a faint red or green of stone.

At the Accademia stop, the third, Ray walked briskly with his suitcase into the wide, paved way across the island towards the Zattere quay. He cut through by way of an arched passage into what looked like a blind alley, but he remembered that it turned left after a few yards, and remembered also the blue tile plaque on the side of the house straight ahead that said John Ruskin had lived and worked there. The Pensione Seguso was just to the left after the left turn. Ray disliked awakening the porter. He pushed the bell.

After two minutes or so, an old man in a red jacket that he had not taken time to fasten opened the door and greeted him courteously and rode up with him in a small lift to the third floor.

His room was simple and clean and had a view through its tall windows of Giudecca across the water and, directly below, of the

small canal that went along one side of the pensione. Ray put on his pyjamas and washed at the basin – there hadn't been a room with bath free, the porter said – and fell into bed. He had thought he was very tired, but after a few minutes he was sure he would not be able to get to sleep. He was familiar with the sensation from the Mallorca days, a tremulous exhaustion that put a faint shakiness in his penline or his handwriting. The only thing to do was walk it off. He got up and dressed in comfortable clothes, and let himself quietly out of the hotel.

Dawn was rising now. A gondolier swathed in navy blue propelled a cargo of Coca-Cola crates into the canal beside the pensione. A motor-boat dashed in a straight line up the Giudecca Canal, as if scurrying home guiltily after a late party.

Ray ran up the arched steps of the Accademia bridge and headed inland for San Marco. He walked through narrow grey streets whose shop-fronts were tight closed, through small squares – Campo Morosini, Campo Manin, familiar, unchanged, yet Ray did not know them well enough to remember every detail of them. He passed only one person, an old woman with a large flat basket of Brussels sprouts. Then the American Express's tiles appeared under his feet, directing him with an arrow to their office, and he saw the lower part of the Piazza San Marco's columns in front of him.

He walked into the giant rectangle of the Piazza. The space seemed to make a sound like 'Ah-h' on his ears, like an unending exhalation of a spirit. To right and left, the arches of two arcades diminished in regular progression. Out of a strange self-consciousness at standing still, Ray began to walk, shy now of the humble brushing sound of his desert boot soles on the cement. A few awakening pigeons fluttered around their nests in the arcades, and two or three came down to peck for food on the Piazza. They paid no more attention to Ray, who walked very near them, than if he had not existed. Then Ray took to the shelter of the arcade.

Jewellers' shops were curtained and barred by folding grillwork. Near the end of the arcade, he went out into the Piazza again and looked at the cathedral as he walked by it, blinked as he always had at its complexity, its variety of styles all crammed together. An artistic mess, he supposed, yet it had been erected to amaze and impress, and in that it succeeded.

Ray had been to Venice five or six times before, beginning when he had come with his parents at the age of fourteen. His mother had known Europe far better than his father, but his father had been stricter about making him study it, making him listen to his teaching records in Italian and French. The summer he was seventeen, his father had presented him with a crash course in French at the Berlitz School in St Louis. Ray had always liked Italy and Italian cities better than Paris, better than the *château* district which his father so admired and whose scenery had seemed to Ray as a boy like calendar pictures.

It was six-forty-five. Ray found a bar-caffè that was opening, went in and stood at the counter. A healthy-looking blonde girl with large blue-grey eyes and cheeks like peaches took his order for a cappuccino, and made it herself at the machine. A boy assistant was busy filling glass containers with buns. The girl wore a fresh, pale blue smock uniform. She looked into his eyes as she set the cup before him, not in a flirtatious or even personal way, but in the way Ray felt all Italians of whatever age or sex looked at people – as if they actually saw them. Did she live with her parents, Ray wondered, or was she recently married? But she went away before he could glance at her hand for a ring, and in fact he didn't care. He cupped his cold hands round the hot cup, and was aware of the girl's happy, healthy face on the other side of the counter, though he did not look at her again. With his second coffee, he got a croissant, paid the extra to sit down, and went to a small table. Next door, now, he was able to buy a newspaper. He sat for nearly an hour while the city awakened around him, and

the street outside began to fill with people hurrying in both directions. The skinny little boy in black trousers and white jacket took out tray after tray of cappuccini for delivery in the neighbourhood, and returned swinging his empty tray between thumb and forefinger. Though he looked no more than twelve and should have been in school, he had a crush on the blonde girl, who treated him like a kid brother, tweaking the back of his hair.

It was up to him to find Coleman and party, Ray supposed, not for them to run into each other in some restaurant or in the Piazza, Coleman perhaps registering shock, or saying, 'Ray, what a surprise to see you here!' But it was barely eight, too early to try to ring them at the Gritti or anywhere. Ray debated going back to the pensione for some sleep, then decided to walk a bit farther. Shopkeepers were arranging their wares now, hanging pocket-books and scarves outside the doors of cramped shops, rolling up blinds to reveal windows full of leather goods.

Ray looked through a window at a green-black-and-yellow scarf, its floral pattern nearly covering its white ground. A pang had gone through him at the sight of it, and it seemed that only after the pang did he see the scarf, and still a second later realized he had noticed it because it looked like Peggy. She would have adored it, though in fact he did not remember a scarf of hers that was like this one. He walked on, five or six paces, then turned. He wanted the scarf. The shop was not yet open. To kill time, Ray drank an Espresso and smoked another cigarette in a bar in the same street. When he returned, the shop was opening, and he bought the scarf for two thousand lire. The salesgirl put it into a pretty box and wrapped it with care, thinking he was going to give it to a girl.

Then Ray walked back to the Pensione Seguso. He was calmer now. In his room, he hung the scarf over the back of his straight chair, threw away the paper and box, and got into pyjamas again. He sat on his bed and looked at the scarf. It was as if Peggy were

in the room with him. It needed no touch of her perfume, no folds from her tying, to look exactly like Peggy, and Ray wondered if he shouldn't remove it, put it away in his suitcase at least? Then he decided he was absurd, and lay back on his bed and slept.

He awakened at eleven to the sound of church bells, though he knew they had chimed every quarter of an hour since he fell asleep. Try Coleman, he thought, or they'll be out for lunch and not back until five. There was no telephone in his room. Ray put on his trench-coat and went into the hall to the telephone that stood on a sideboard.

'Would you ring the Hotel Gritti Palace, please?' he asked.

There was no one named Coleman at the Gritti.

Ray asked for the Royal Danieli.

Again the answer was no.

Had Coleman lied about going to Venice? It seemed rather likely that he had, would have done, whether Ray were killed or not. Ray smiled at the thought that Coleman might be in Naples or Paris or even still in Rome.

There was the Bauer-Gruenwald. Or the Monaco. Ray lifted the telephone again. 'The Hotel Bauer-Gruenwald, please.' A longer wait, then he put the question to the new voice.

'Signor Col-e-man. One moment, please.'

Ray waited.

"Allo?" said a female voice.

'Madame – Inez?' Ray did not know her last name. 'This is Ray Garrett. I'm sorry to disturb you. I wanted to speak to Ed.'

'Ah, Ray! Where are you? Here?'

'Yes, I'm in Venice. Is Ed there? If he's not, I can –'

'He is here,' she said in a comfortably firm tone, dropping all her aitches. 'One moment, please, Ray.'

It was a long moment. Ray wondered if Coleman was declining to speak. Then Coleman's voice said:

'Yes?'

'Hello. I thought I'd let you know I'm in Venice.'

'Well, well. Quite a surprise. How long are you here for?'

'Just a day or so – I'd like to see you, if possible.'

'By all means. And you should meet Inez? – Inez Schneider.'

Coleman sounded just a trifle rattled, but recovered as he said, 'Dinner tonight? Where is it we're going, Inez? – Da Colombo around eight-thirty,' he said to Ray.

'Maybe I can see you after dinner. Or this afternoon? I'd rather see you alone.' An explosive blast like a Bronx cheer from the telephone numbed Ray's ear for a moment, and he lost what Coleman was saying. 'Could you say that again? Sorry.'

'I said,' Coleman's taut, ordinary American voice said in a bored manner, 'it was high time you met Inez. We'll see you at eight-thirty at Da Colombo, Ray.' Coleman hung up.

Ray was angry. Should he ring back and say he wouldn't come for dinner, that he would see him at any other time? He went into his room to think about it, but within a few seconds he decided to let it go and to turn up at half past eight.

3

Ray was deliberately fifteen minutes late, but not late enough, as Coleman had not arrived. Ray walked twice through the big restaurant, looking for him. He went out and entered the first bar he saw. He ordered a Scotch.

Then he saw Coleman and a woman and a young man walking by the bar, Coleman laughing loudly at something, his body rocking back. Not quite two weeks after his only child had died, Ray thought. A strange man. Ray finished his drink.

He entered the restaurant when he thought they had had time to be seated. They were in the second room he looked into. Ray had to go very close to the table before Coleman deigned to look up and greet him.

‘Ah, Ray! Sit down. Inez – may I present Inez Schneider? Ray Garrett.’

‘Enchantée, M. Garrett,’ she said.

‘Enchanté, madame,’ Ray replied.

‘And Antonio Santini,’ said Coleman, indicating the dark, wavy-haired young Italian at the table.

Antonio half stood up and extended a hand. ‘Piacere.’

‘Piacere,’ Ray said, shaking his hand.

'Sit down,' said Coleman.

Ray hung his coat on a hook and sat down. He glanced at Inez, who was looking at him. She was a darkish blonde, about forty-five, slight, and she wore good jewellery. She was not quite pretty; she had a receding and rather pointed chin, but Ray sensed a warmth and femininity, perhaps something maternal in her, that was most attractive. And again, looking at Coleman's bloating face, his unappetizing brown moustache, his balding head freckled from Mallorca, imagining the bulging belly below the table level, Ray wondered how he could attract women as fastidious as Inez seemed to be. Coleman had been with another woman very much the type of Inez, when Ray had met him and Peggy the spring before last at an exhibition in the Via Margutta. *My father's always the one who says good-bye*, Peggy's voice said in his ear, and Ray hitched himself forward nervously in his chair.

'You're a painter?' asked Antonio on his right, in Italian.

'I'm a poor painter. I'm a better collector,' Ray answered. He hadn't the energy or the inclination to inquire into Antonio's work. Coleman had said Antonio was a painter.

'I'm very happy to meet you finally,' Inez said to Ray. 'I wanted to meet you in Rome.'

Ray smiled slightly, and could think of nothing to say. It didn't matter. He sensed that Inez would be sympathetic. She was wearing a good and rather powerful perfume, earrings with a pendant green stone, a green and black jersey dress.

The waiter arrived, and they ordered. Then Inez said to Ray:

'You are going back to the States?'

'Eventually, but I go to Paris first. I must see some painters there.'

'Doesn't care for my work,' Coleman mumbled across his cigar.

'Oh, Edward,' Inez said, pronouncing the name 'Édouard.'

Ray tried to look as if he hadn't heard. He was not fond of Coleman's current pop art phase, but it had simply never crossed

his mind to invite Coleman to join his gallery. Coleman now considered himself 'European'. As far as Ray knew, he was not and did not want to be represented by a New York gallery. Coleman had given up his job as a civil engineer when Peggy was four years old and had started painting. For this Ray liked him, and for this Peggy's mother had divorced him, claiming Peggy. (And perhaps there had been another woman in the picture, too.) Then in less than a year, Peggy's mother had been killed in a car she was driving. Coleman, in Paris, had then been informed that he had custody of his daughter, and that his deceased wife, who had been rich, had settled a trust fund on Peggy which Coleman could not touch, but which would pay for her education and bring her an income when she became twenty-one. All this Peggy had told Ray. Peggy had become twenty-one while they were married, and had enjoyed four months of the income. It could not, Peggy had said, be passed on by her to her father or anyone else. On her death it had reverted to an aunt in America.

'You are going to start a gallery in New York,' Inez said.

'Yes. My partner – Bruce Main – hasn't got the space as yet. We're trying for it.' Ray could scarcely talk, but he made an effort. 'It's not a new idea of mine. It's an old one. Peggy and I – We'd –' He glanced inadvertently at Coleman, and found Coleman's small eyes fixed calculatingly on him. 'We were planning to go to New York after our year in Mallorca.'

'A little more than a year,' Coleman put in.

'Peggy wanted to stay on,' Ray said.

Coleman shrugged, as if to express disbelief or that what Peggy had wanted was of no consequence.

'Are you seeing painters in Venice, too?' Inez asked.

Ray was grateful for her civilized voice. 'No,' he said.

Their food arrived. Ray had ordered cannelloni. Meat was repellent, the cannelloni merely uninviting. Coleman ate with appetite.

‘What did you want to talk about?’ Coleman asked Ray, pouring wine from the carafe for himself first, then for Ray.

‘Perhaps I can see you some time tomorrow,’ Ray replied.

Antonio was listening to every word, hanging on their conversation, and Ray was inclined to dismiss him as of no importance; but as soon as he thought this, it occurred to him that Antonio might be a partner with Coleman, a young man who would help Coleman get rid of him, for a little money. Ray glanced at Antonio’s shiny dark eyes, his serious rather crude lips now gleaming with olive oil, and came to no conclusions about him. And Coleman, talking to Inez, had not answered his suggestion that they meet tomorrow.

‘Where are you staying?’ Coleman asked Ray.

‘The Pensione Seguso.’

‘Where is that?’

‘At Accademia.’

A big table of men at the back of the room was extremely noisy.

Ray leaned forward and said to Coleman, ‘Is there any time tomorrow when I could see you?’

‘I’m not sure – about tomorrow,’ Coleman said, eating and not looking at Ray. ‘We’ve got some friends here. They’re joining us tonight, matter of fact.’ Coleman glanced towards the door, then looked at his watch. ‘What time did they say?’ he asked Inez.

‘Nine-thirty,’ Inez replied. ‘They eat early, you know.’

Ray cursed himself for having come tonight. Under the circumstances, there was nothing to do but be polite and leave as soon as possible. But he could think of nothing, absolutely nothing, to say to Inez. Nothing to say to her even about Venice.

The time dragged on. Antonio talked to Inez and Coleman about the horse races in Rome. He was enthusiastic. Ray could not listen.

Coleman stood up, letting his napkin fall. ‘Well? Better late than never. Here they are!’

A man and woman approached the table, and with difficulty Ray tried to focus on them.

‘Hello, Laura!’ Coleman said. ‘Francis, how are you? Mr and Mrs Smith-Peters, my – former son-in-law, Ray Garrett.’

Ray stood up and acknowledged the rude introduction politely, and found an extra chair that was needed. They looked like very ordinary Americans in their mid-fifties, and they looked as if they had money.

‘Oh, yes, we’ve eaten, thanks,’ Laura Smith-Peters said, sitting down. ‘Americans, you know. We still like eating around eight.’ She was speaking to Inez. She had reddish hair, and her voice was too high and rather nasal. From her hard ‘r’ Ray gathered she was Wisconsin or Indiana.

‘And we’re on demi-pension at the Monaco, so we thought we had to eat there tonight, because we were out to lunch,’ Mr Smith-Peters said with facetious precision, his thin, birdlike face smiling at Inez.

Ray became aware that Mrs Smith-Peters was gathering herself to speak to him, no doubt about Peggy, and he braced himself.

‘We’re really very sorry to hear about the tragedy in your life,’ she said. ‘We’d known Peggy since she was eighteen. But not well, because she was always away at school. Such a lovely girl.’

Ray nodded.

‘We’re from Milwaukee. I am. My husband’s a Californian, but we’ve lived most of our lives in Milwaukee. Except for the last year. Where’re you from?’

‘St Louis,’ Ray said.

Coleman ordered another litre of wine, and glasses for the Smith-Peters. But Mrs Smith-Peters did not want any wine, and at last, on Coleman’s insistence that she have something, asked for a cup of tea.

‘What do you do?’ Ray asked Mr Smith-Peters, feeling the question wouldn’t bother him.

'Manufacturer of sporting equipment,' Mr Smith-Peters responded briskly. 'Golf balls, tennis rackets, skin-diving stuff. My partner's carrying on in Milwaukee, but the doctor ordered complete rest for me. Heart attack a year ago. So now we break our necks climbing three flights of stone stairs in Florence – we live there now – and chasing around Venice –'

'Darling, since when are we *chasing* around?' his wife put in.

He was a man who liked to move quickly, Ray saw. His hair was nearly white. Ray could not imagine him young, with more weight on him, but it was easy to imagine his wife young, bright-blue-eyed and pert, with a rather common Irish prettiness that needs youth or else. Mr Smith-Peters's face reminded Ray of certain old baseball players' faces he occasionally saw on sports pages in the States and never cared to read about. Lean, hawk-nosed, grinning. Ray did not like to ask if he had been keen on any sport before he started his business. He knew the answer would be either baseball or golf.

Ray felt Mrs Smith-Peters's eyes on him, looking him over perhaps for signs of grief, perhaps for signs of brutality or coldness that might have precipitated Peggy's suicide. Ray did not know what Coleman had told them, but it would not have been anything favourable, not a single thing, except perhaps that he had money, a fact Coleman would have stated with faint contempt. Yet Coleman had a nose for money himself, witness his wife, and the woman he was with now. And the Smith-Peters. The Smith-Peters were typical of the people Coleman collected for social and economic reasons. They probably cared little about art, but Coleman could sell them one of his paintings. Coleman could take a woman, with whom he contemplated an affair, to a party given by people like the Smith-Peters, and impress her. Peggy, for all her rather primitive terror of and respect for her father, had deplored his sponging and his hypocrisy.

'We were so surprised when Ed came up to us this morning in

the plaza,' Mrs Smith-Peters said to Inez. 'We had no idea he was here. We're just here for a couple of weeks while they're installing the central heating in our Florence house.' She looked at Ray. 'We met Ed and Peggy in St Moritz one Christmas.'

'Laura, would you like to sweeten that tea with a cognac?' Coleman interrupted.

'No, thank you, Ed. Cognac keeps me awake,' Mrs Smith-Peters replied. She turned to Inez. 'Are you here for long, Mme. Schneider?'

'You will have to ask Edward that,' Inez said with a wave of a hand. 'He said something about painting here, so – who knows?'

Her frankness, the fact she admitted being in Coleman's charge, seemed to surprise Mrs Smith-Peters, who might have suspected their relationship but hadn't expected the female half to reveal it. 'Paintings – of Venice?'

Ray tried to imagine what Coleman's heavy black outlines and flat expanses of unvaried colour would make of Venice.

'You seem quite depressed,' Mrs Smith-Peters said gently to Ray, and Ray hated Coleman's hearing it.

Coleman listened.

'That can't be helped,' Ray said just as quietly, and in a way that he hoped dismissed the subject, but Coleman said:

'Why shouldn't he look gloomy – a man who saw his wife die, a girl die, two weeks ago.' Coleman waved his cigar for emphasis.

'He did not *see* her die, Edward,' Inez said, leaning forward.

'He saw her die by inches before he found her dead,' Coleman retorted. He was certainly feeling his liquor, but he was also far from drunk.

Mrs Smith-Peters seemed to want to ask a question, but thought better of it. She looked like a distressed little Irish girl.

'It happened while Ray was out of the house for several hours,' Inez said to Mrs Smith-Peters.

'Yes, and where was he?' Coleman smiled towards Antonio,

who still listened with serious attention, then turned towards Mr Smith-Peters, whom he wanted to draw into the conversation. 'He was at the house of a woman neighbour. On a morning or an afternoon when his wife was obviously in trouble, he was somewhere else.'

Ray could not look at anyone at the table. But Coleman's words did not hurt so much now, strangely, as they had in Mallorca when he and Coleman had been alone. 'She was not obviously in distress that day,' Ray said.

'No more than any other day, you mean,' said Coleman.

'Edward, I am *sure* we don't want to hear all this again,' Inez said, tapping with a table-knife hilt on the tablecloth, the knife held straight up. 'I am sure the Smith-Peters don't.'

'There was no one in the house?' Mrs Smith-Peters asked softly, perhaps meaning to show polite interest, but it was awful.

'The maid was there, but she left at one after fixing the lunch,' Coleman told her, glad of an ear. 'Ray came home after three and found Peggy in the tub. Cut her wrists. Drowned also.'

Even Antonio squirmed slightly.

'How awful!' Mrs Smith-Peters murmured.

'Good God!' whispered Mr Smith-Peters, and cleared his throat.

'Ray wasn't back for lunch that day,' Coleman said, meaningfully.

Nor did that hurt so much. Ray had been at the house of Elizabeth Bayard, American, aged twenty-six or so; and he had been looking at her drawings, which were better than her paintings. She was new in the village, and he and Peggy had been to her house only once. She had served him a Dubonnet and soda with ice, and he had talked and smiled a great deal that day, he remembered, enjoying Elizabeth's company because she was attractive, decent and well-meaning; though not even those qualities were needed to make him enjoy those two or three hours with her, because he was tired of the handful of Americans and

English in the village. He had said, 'I'm sure Peggy doesn't care if I'm back for lunch or not. I said I mightn't be.' Lunch was always cold, and they could eat it or not eat it, and at whatever hour they wished. And it was quite true, as Coleman implied, that he found Elizabeth Bayard attractive (Coleman had put it more strongly in Mallorca, but Ray had conceded nothing on this point), and he remembered thinking that afternoon that he could, if he were so inclined, probably start an affair with Elizabeth and conceal it from Peggy, and that Elizabeth would be casual and affectionate and that it would be a most salubrious change from Peggy's mysticism for him. Ray also knew he never would have begun an affair. One couldn't, with a girl like Peggy for a wife, a girl for whom ideals were real, even indestructible, maybe the realest things on earth. And certainly physically he had scarcely had energy for an affair, anyway.

'He does look gloomy enough to do away with himself, and maybe he will,' said Coleman, mumbling again.

'Edward, I insist you stop this,' said Inez.

But another question was rising in Mrs Smith-Peters. She looked at her husband, as if asking his permission, but he was staring at the tablecloth. 'Was she painting at all?' she asked Ray.

'Less and less, I'm afraid. It was too bad. We – Because we had plenty of servants. There was lots of time.'

Coleman was again listening critically.

Ray went on: 'It was a lazy atmosphere, though. I had a certain routine, an easy one, but – people fall apart without one. Peggy dropped her morning painting, and then she'd paint in the late afternoon, if she painted at all.'

'Sounds utterly depressing,' Coleman said.

But Peggy had not acted at all depressed, Ray thought. He could not say this. It sounded self-justifying. And what right had these strangers to hold a tribunal about him and Peggy? Ray tossed his napkin nervously on to the table.

Mrs Smith-Peters looked at her watch and said they must go. She turned to Inez. 'I wondered if you and Ed would like to go to the Ca' Rezzonica? I love the place. I was thinking of tomorrow morning.'

'May we ring you at breakfast?' Inez asked. 'Is nine or nine-thirty too early?'

'Oh, heavens, no, we're up at eight,' said Mrs Smith-Peters. Her husband rose first.

'Perhaps you'd like to come, too,' Mrs Smith-Peters said to Ray as she stood up.

'I'm afraid I can't,' Ray said. 'Thank you.'

The Smith-Peters departed.

'Can you get the check, Inez? Back in a minute,' Coleman said, getting up. He walked towards the back of the restaurant.

Antonio stood up as soon as Coleman's back was turned. 'If you excuse me,' he said in English. 'I think I go back to my hotel. I am very tired. I must write my mother.'

'Oh, of course, Antonio,' said Inez. 'We'll see you tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow.' Antonio bent over her hand and deposited a token kiss. 'Good night,' he said to Ray. 'Good night, madame.'

Inez looked for a waiter.

Ray raised his arm, but failed to catch the waiter's attention.

'Ray, I wish you would leave Venice,' Inez said to him. 'What good does it do for you to see Edward again?'

Ray sighed. 'Ed doesn't understand yet. I somehow need to explain more to him.'

'Did he have dinner with you the last night in Rome?'

'Yes.'

'I thought so. But he said it was someone else. Listen, Ray, Edward will never understand. He was so mad about his daughter –' She closed her eyes, tilted her head back, but wasted only a second in this, because she was trying to speak before Coleman returned. 'I never met Peggy, but I heard about her from lots of

people. Head in the clouds, they say. She was like a goddess to Edward, someone not even human. Too good for humans.'

'I know.'

'He thinks you are very callous. I see that is not true. But I see also that he will never understand it was not your fault.'

What she said did not surprise Ray. Coleman had called him callous in Mallorca, and probably would have called any husband of Peggy's that, even if Peggy had had a happy marriage, with lots of children, even if Peggy had been radiating joy, fulfilment, and all the rest of it.

'Is it true that Peggy was frightened of sex?' Inez asked.

'No. No, really, on the contrary – he's coming back.'

'Can you leave Venice tomorrow?'

'No, I—'

'I must see you tomorrow. Eleven o'clock at Florian's?'

Ray had no time to answer, as Coleman was sitting down, but he gave her a nod. It was easier than refusing.

'Our waiter is so busy,' said Inez, with convincing exasperation as if they'd been trying to get him all the while.

'Jesus God!' Coleman said with a sigh, squirming around in his chair. 'Cameriere! Conto, per favore!'

Ray pulled out two thousand-lire notes, more than his share.

'Put that away,' said Coleman.

'No, I insist,' Ray said, repocketing his wallet.

'Put it away, I said,' Coleman said rudely. He was paying, no doubt with money Inez had given him at some time.

Ray said nothing. He stood up. 'I'll say good night, if I may.' He made a bow to Inez. Then he got his coat from the hook. It was the coat, the only overcoat he had with him, in which the two bullet-holes were in the left sleeve, but the coat was almost black, the holes not very noticeable. He raised his left arm and smiled as he departed.