

WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

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*The Tragic Story of a Greek Vase
Told in a Masterly Way*

The Two Men Who Murdered Each Other

A Remarkable Novelette

By VALMA CLARK

IT WAS ON Cape Cod one August, while I was browsing through antique shops in quest of a particular kind of colonial andirons for one of our patrons, that I stumbled onto the Old Scholar.

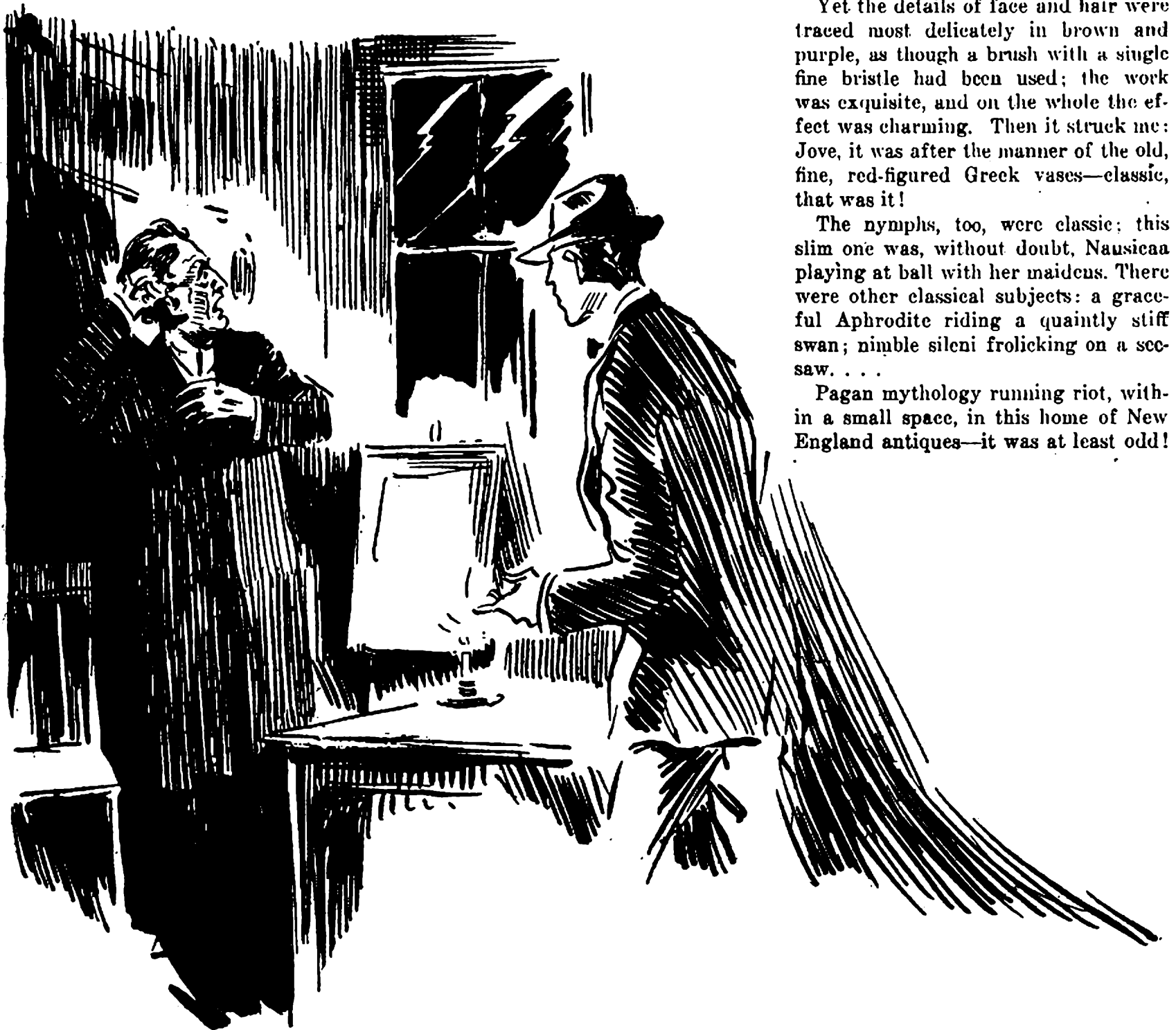
There, in a white farmhouse back from the King's Highway, among a litter of old Cape lanterns and great bulging liqueur bottles of green and amber glass, ancient teakettles and brass door knockers and the inevitable

bayberry candles, I came upon painted book ends of heavy wood on which bright orange nymphs disported themselves against a velvet-black background. A bizarre color scheme, was my first conventional reaction.

Yet the details of face and hair were traced most delicately in brown and purple, as though a brush with a single fine bristle had been used; the work was exquisite, and on the whole the effect was charming. Then it struck me: Jove, it was after the manner of the old, fine, red-figured Greek vases—classic, that was it!

The nymphs, too, were classic; this slim one was, without doubt, Nausicaa playing at ball with her maidens. There were other classical subjects: a graceful Aphrodite riding a quaintly stiff swan; nimble silen frolicking on a seesaw. . . .

Pagan mythology running riot, within a small space, in this home of New England antiques—it was at least odd!



Here, where one sought the genuine old colonial—though usually in vain, to be sure—to come upon this curious classical twist!

Even as I wondered, my eye fell upon a fresh subject, and the wonder changed to genuine admiration and sharpened to a very keen curiosity concerning the artist who achieved such arresting beauty with such crude materials. It was a broken painting, like a Venus with a missing arm. It showed the head and shoulders of Pallas Athena and the head and shoulders of a youth who played to her on a double flute. The goddess' head, which still bore the warrior's helmet, was bent in a listening attitude toward the music, and her pose was one of relaxation and peace after fierce combat.

It was a quiet thing, with quiet, flowing lines, for all the unfinished ragged edge which cut the figures off just above the waist. Somehow, it held the dignity and sincerity of great religious art. And now I noticed that there were other identical Athenas, that the fragmentary painting recurred on fully half of the book ends: as though it were the motif of all his work, I thought—the one serious theme running through all these lighter themes.

"But only a man thoroughly steeped in Greek mythology—loving it—could do that—"

"Pardon, sir!" said the young woman who kept shop.

"This! It's rather remarkable. Who is he—tell me about him!" I begged of her impulsively.

"I can't tell you much. He lives alone over on the back shore, and he brings us these to sell. His name is Twining—"Tinker" Twining, they call him."

"But this broken thing—what does it mean?"

She shook her head.

"He never talks; only say he hasn't the pattern for the rest, and it would be sacrilege to finish it without the true lines."

"Hm—reverence and a conscience," I muttered; "rare enough these days. I'll take the pair of them. How much?"

"Five dollars."

"And a pair of the nymphs," I added, since it seemed absurdly cheap.

"Sorry, but we've only one of those. It's used as a door prop, you see."

"No, not a door prop!" I lamented. "But I'd use mine as book ends, and I'd put the Romantic Poets between them."

"I'll tell you,"—the girl turned suddenly helpful,—"you might leave an

order with us for Mr. Twining to paint you one. He'd be glad to do it."

"Or I might take the order to Mr. Twining myself," I exclaimed eagerly. "I've a car outside and I've time to kill. How do I get to him?"

"But you can't drive. You follow the sand road to the end, and then take a narrow path across to the ocean side. It's three miles over, the only house—"

"No matter! I've a fancy to meet him. Oh, I see by your face you wouldn't advise it."

"It's only that he's—something of a hermit," she hesitated. "He's a very courteous old gentleman, but no one ever visits him."

"Then it's time some one started, and I've a faculty for getting on with hermits," I assured her gaily.

I thanked her, found a quiet inn, parked my car for the night, and started on a late afternoon ramble for the back shore and a Mr. "Tinker" Twining.

I FOLLOWED a sand trail like a wind—white chalk line between growths of springy hog cranberry, scrub oak and pine—a most desolate and forsaken country—until at last I stepped out abruptly upon a high cliff over the Atlantic Ocean.

Clouds had sponged out the blue sky, and instead of the late sunlight there was a strange yellow glow over everything. All those light, bright Cape colors—turquoise blue and gay copper-gold and honey-yellow—had been dimmed.

The sea was very still, of dull purples and greens, and the broad cream beach, below the sand scrap upon which I stood, had a grayish tinge. Above me, on the highest point of the cliff and huddled too close to its shifting edge, was one of those low, weather-beaten, Cape houses. I climbed to it, and wading through beach grass and vines of the wild beach pea, came to the back door.

The house was quiet, and I had a glimpse of a scrupulously neat, old-style kitchen—cumbersome flatirons in a row and a brick oven built into the chimney—as I stood there hesitating.

Then, against a further window which framed the lowering sea and sky, I saw the profile of an old, white-haired man.

He sat at a work bench and he held a brush poised in his hand, but he was not painting. His head was up and he was listening—it was almost as though he were listening to that strange electric yellow that permeated all the air, was the queer thought I had. I was struck at once by the extreme delicacy and the fine-drawn suffering of the old man's face; indeed, the lines of that tragic

profile might have been traced with the single fine bristle of his own brush, in those same delicate browns and purples.

Moreover, the setting was all wrong: the old, frail face was somehow not up to that sullen sweep of sky and ocean. It was as though an exquisite thing of beaten and fretted silver should be mounted alone upon a coarse expanse of dull burlap—a broad background that called for granite at least.

I tapped, and the old man stirred.

"Good afternoon," I called.

He came slowly to the door.

"They sent me from that antique place—the *Open Latch*. I'd like to get you to do me another book end."

"Book end?" he muttered.

"I hoped you might be willing to paint it and send it on to me,"

"Ah yes." Clearly he was following me only with his eyes; with his soul he was still listening to his own thoughts.

I found myself puzzled as to how to reach him. A baffling aroma of archaism hung about this elderly man: breathed not only from his worn black suit, which was not of this day, but also from his manner and the very inflection of his voice, which were somehow reminiscent of the old school.

"The nymphs," I insisted; "the one of Nausicaa."

There I caught him, "Nausicaa—you knew?"

"Well, I guessed."

"They don't as a rule; to the general they are merely odd little maidens sporting at ball." His smile came out as pure gold filtered from the dross of suffering—a rare, lovable smile that immediately won me to the old gentleman. "I shall be happy to paint the Nausicaa for you, sir," he added formally, and awaited my further pleasure.

"The name," I said; "perhaps you'd better jot down my name and address."

"Of course—the name." Obediently he brought pad and pencil, and in a fine, scholarly hand wrote "Mr. Claude Van Nuys," with my New York address.

Absently, he permitted me to pay him and stood ready to bid me good afternoon.

Still I lingered. "The silen; and the goddess on the swan—Aphrodite, isn't she?"

"You pass, my boy,—grade A," he smiled.

"And the Pallas Athena—that's splendid work, only why—?"

"Ah, the Athena!" A flicker of pain touched the old man's face, and he grew reticent and vague again.

I would have given him up then, had not a terrific and absolutely unheralded blast of wind come to my assistance,

striking up the sand in swirling clouds about us.

"Whew!" I whistled, covering my face against the cut of that fine shot. "We're in for a gale, yes? I say—"

But I was shocked to dumbness by the look of strained and unadulterated horror on old Mr. Twining's face. He was breathing hard and backing into the house as though driven against the storm.

"A bad night," he muttered; "wind and a sea. . . . It was just such a night—" He rediscovered me with a start and with something approaching relief, I thought.

"But you couldn't stay out in this," he reasoned, more to himself than to me; "it then becomes necessary—Sir,"—he slipped easily into the role of courteous host—"will you accept the shelter of my roof until the storm passes?"

He waited for me to precede him into the house, saw me seated in the only comfortable chair in the dim living-room, and, having first excused himself, sat down at his work-bench and again took up his brush.

Slowly the room darkened. The old man forgot me and relapsed into mutterings, quivering under each shrill onslaught of the wind, pausing to listen for the moan of the surf below.

"You're deucedly close to this cliff," I ventured once, when a shower of sand swished against the window-pane.

"Eh—the cliff? Some winter nights she'll rise up to the very house and drench the glass of my windows—the sea will," he shuddered. "She's eating back—eating back; forty years ago, when I first came here, there was a front yard."

"But isn't it unsafe?"

"Perhaps," vaguely.

So he worked on until he could no longer see, and then he lit a candle, and turned to the tracing of a pattern from the colored plate of a book. There were several similar volumes at his elbow, and I dared to take one up and run it through. They were, as I had guessed, plates of the more famous Greek vases—mostly those of the red-figured period. "Douris—Euphronios—Hieron," I read aloud; "oh, and those exquisite old white lekythoi!"

The effect upon the old man was instantaneous. Those names—*Hieron*, *white lekythoi*—were the magic passwords to him! He turned to me as a starved dog might turn to food:

"Ah, you know them—the cup-painters!" And he loosed upon me such a flood of scientific enthusiasm and technicalities and dates, with such an undercurrent of reverence and love for

the pure beauty of these old vases, as left me breathless, feeling that I had at last found a scientist and a poet rolled into one.

"You know, you know!" he exulted. "Now you recall the Douris Athena—"

"But I know nothing, really," I interrupted him, impelled to honesty by his own intense sincerity. "My knowledge of the classics is general. We deal only in period stuff at the House of Harrow, where I'm a buyer—English and French periods mostly—for a Fifth Avenue clientele. Oh, I once dipped into Greek art on my own account, picked up the patter, but beyond that—"

He would not have it.

"You speak the language," he insisted. "And do you know that it is nearly half a century since I've talked to anyone who speaks my own tongue—nearly half a century since I've met a man who's ever heard of Euphronios, the master cup-painter? Lord, how it takes me back!"

The old man laughed. The storm and his terrors were forgotten; the glow in his heart burned up in his cheeks like a fever.

"This—these books,"—his hand swept the colored plate,—"they're all I have left—the only link I allow myself."

"Do you mean—? With your passion for the classics, you shut yourself up alone here—starve yourself! But in God's name, man, why?"

"That's why—in God's name." The old man's head was bowed; for a moment the pain was back on his face. But that brittle zest flamed up in him again. "You questioned about my Athena! You are the first man who would comprehend. Wait!"

Smiling like a child with a secret, he tiptoed to a chest of drawers, brought out something wrapped in tissue paper. Very tenderly he unwound the papers, and produced before me the broken half of a red-figured cylix, with one handle attached but with the standard missing. He waited triumphantly for my exclamation.

"Why," I said lamely, "the interior is that same Athena with her flute player. It seems—a very fine fragment—"

"Fine!"—he scorned the adjective. "Fine! Sir, this is the best of its kind—the aristocrat of the Greek vase. See!—The finished lines went something like this."

He caught up a pencil, laid the fragment flat on a sheet of white paper, and completed the broken figures of the Athena and the youth. I noted his hands as he sketched: fine, long-fingered hands, nervous, but sure at their work.

"You see?" he asked. "Now on the exterior of the cylix we have Athena mounting her quadriga after the battle. Is it not a contrast, that peaceful Athena and this Athena? Is he not, indeed, an artist of variety, the man who could do those two things, each so perfectly? You will note the horses—the bold, vigorous lines—the power and swing. It is naked, masculine drawing this—yes, scriptural. Euphronios—" Old Twining broke off, returned to his more precise exposition: "The other half of the cup—the exterior—showed Athena sending her spear into the giant Ankelados—"

"But where is the other half?" I wondered. "You must have seen it, since you hold the answer to the riddle."

"Yes," he returned slowly, "I have seen it; God knows I do hold the answer to the riddle. . . ."

But he came back to me—or rather to the beloved fragment of the cylix.

"The coloring!" he breathed. "That deep orange glow and the velvet-black and that fine gloss over all. . . . The secret of Greek potters, buried with them. Perfect to the very eyelashes. . . ."

Sitting there, he lost himself in reverent admiration of the shard. He did not touch it—it was as though the fragment were too precious to handle; but he gave his soul to it through his eyes. He was oblivious to the wail of a rising wind and the thunder of a rising surf.

"It is," he announced quietly at last, "the half of a genuine, unpublished Euphronios."

I stared. "You say this is—an unpublished Euphronios?"

"Yes. The signature was on the other piece."

"But man alive, given that other piece,—and you must know where it is to be so familiar with it—this fragment is worth a king's ransom. A genuine whole Euphronios—why, the museums alone, bidding against each other—"

"The other half is gone," spoke the old man; "gone forever. But this piece itself is still worth more than a king's ransom; not in gold, but in the coin of knowledge—the knowledge it will give the world of Greek art."

His gray eyes widened to a vision; the poet was drowned in the farseeing scientist.

For that instant I felt myself in the presence of nobility—but the old man's dignity was abruptly shattered. With the rush as of an oncoming engine, the full blast of an Atlantic gale struck us: screamed and whined and groaned, and shook the old house until it rattled like a bag of loose bones.

In the same moment the rain came down in a deluge, swept the window-panes and beat a very devil's tattoo upon the roof. I flatter myself I am no coward, but I found myself clutching at the heavy work-bench for anchorage. By the wavering candle-light I discovered my host crowded back against the wall, his hands pressed to his eyes. He seemed to be in physical agony; it flashed to me that he was suffering a stroke of some kind.

I reached him in two steps:

"What is it? Sir—Mr. Twining!"

His mutterings were part of a disjointed prayer. I laid my hand on his shoulder, and suddenly he was clinging to me, like a child who finds an unexpected hand in the dark, and was speaking rapidly, incoherently:

"No, no, it's not the storm; it's the things it brings up here, in my head—images—scenes no human being should have. . . staged. I live it over again—over and over—like Macbeth. Don't leave me—*don't!* It's His will. He sends you, and the storm holds you here—impossible for you to reach the village this night. You shall stay with me, be my first guest in forty years. You shall hear my tale—and judge me."

"Yes, yes," I soothed him, drawing him to a chair, "of course I'll stay."

III.

HE subsided then, his head dropped to his arms which he had flung out on the bench before him; as the wind died down a little, he slowly regained complete control of himself.

"It's mad of me," he sighed, facing me at last; "sometimes I fear I am growing a little mad. But I've a fancy to tell to you—an impartial stranger—the story of how I came by the Euphronios fragment. But you must be hungry; you shall first have supper with me."

He became again the solicitous but unobtrusive host. He moved expertly about the kitchen, set a meticulous table with white linen cloth and pewter utensils, and served me clam broth out of a blue bowl, and brown bread and honey, and some sort of a flower wine of which Horace might have sung. The old man himself supped on three steamed clams and a glass of cold water. Yet he was the perfect host with his fine, aloof hospitality.

At last we settled to the story. Sitting there on opposite sides of his work-bench, with the storm rising and falling in intermittent gusts, and with the broken fragment of the vase between us, its colors glowing out like black onyx and orange coral under the sputtering light

of the candle, we dropped back into the old man's past:

"I was abroad," he began, "in the middle of the 'eighties, on a year's leave of absence from my college, and with me was my friend—Lutz, let us call him—Paul Lutz. I may say here that I had no right to play friend to him, for at heart I despised him—despised his methods, his creeds. One of my college colleagues, a younger man than I, he seemed to have taken a liking to me.

"It was odd, for he was of a wealthy family, and beyond our common interest in archeology and classical subjects—an interest which was rather a fad with him, I suspected—we were at opposite poles. He was shrewd, brilliant even, but how shall I describe him—he, had thick fingers. He was the handsome, spoiled, Byronic type: a full-blooded dark man, part Jew. I have sometimes wondered if I did not keep him by me to watch him, for we were rivals in the same field, even in the same little department, and in those days I made finger exercises of the theories of other scholars and dreamed of striking a great new chord of my own. I wanted fame, you see, recognition, and I was suspicious of Lutz's brilliance. I dare say the basis of many apparent friendships in this world is really a strong rivalry and a mutual suspicion.

"Lutz and I were rivals in more ways than one. There was. . . a young lady in our college town; she received us both. Her name—it would do no harm to tell it now—was Lorna Story, and she was like her name, a fine, silver-gray girl. She had a beautiful mind. . . and a light shining through her gray eyes that was like the haunting line of a poem. . ."

The old man sat silent for a time, as he had been silent before the fine beauty of his Greek vase, and his old, frail face was lit by the same inner glow. He moved to take up from the base of the candlestick a hurt night moth, and, cupping it gently in his two hands, opened the window a crack and released it. Then he continued:

"Lutz and I were in Athens together in the spring in the interest of our college museum, which was then in its infancy. We had at our joint disposal a fund for any valuable specimens, and we haunted the excavation fields and the markets for antiquities. It was the merest chance which led us to the Acropolis at the time they had just started on the work of clearing out the debris which dated before the destruction of the Persians. And it was the merest chance which took us to the spot at the moment the workmen brought to light the vase, in two pieces.

A vase by the potter Euphronios—and the signature was actually visible through the coating of white earth deposits—here in this debris which went back to the days before the Persian sacking in 480! Now Euphronios had long been fixed at a date considerably later. That difference in dates was important: the inferences that followed—why, I had hit upon a tremendous, an epoch-making discovery! I saw my path to scholarly fame opening up before me.

"I talked with the young Greek who was directing operations there, and secured his promise that I should examine the specimen when it had been thoroughly cleaned. Lutz edged close to me, and I saw that he, too, was excited by the vase though concealing his excitement under an air of indifference. But I had no time for Lutz. I got away from him. I pursued those inferences for miles through the streets of Athens, and then tested out my conclusions in the classical library out at the American School. There was no error in my facts, no flaw in my logic.

"I walked the streets longer—hours longer—bit by bit built up my article. Then, in the flush of masterly achievement, I turned back to the small hotel where we were stopping.

"I opened the door of our room to find Lutz bent low over the table. He was gloating over something:

"'You beauty! And to fit with never a flaw—'

"'Good Lord!' I discovered. 'It's the vase!'

"'Right, old boy,' Lutz grinned up at me. 'I've finished giving her a bath with aqua fortis—oh, my caution was extreme, never fear. Now what do you think?'

"Think! What *could* I think? The colors were as you see them now, startling like black and orange enamel. Forgetful of theories, I fell into rhapsodies with him. Lutz caressed the glossy, painted surface with his plump hands and fairly purred; I darted from the tracery of face and garments to the Greek letters of the signature and sipped the honey of our rare find after my own fashion.

"We were like two eager boys who have come upon Captain Kidd's treasure. We dropped into heated argument, I recall: Lutz preferred the strong, battling Athena who hurled her spear at the giant, while I maintained that the quiet Athena, who sat with her head bowed to the music of her flute player, was the greater art. Laughingly, I took possession of my favorite half of

the vase and left to Lutz his savage goddess.

"Then the serious significance of the vase and my intended article intruded, and I returned to earth.

"But how under heaven did you come by it, Lutz?"

"He laughed, cast an apprehensive glance toward the hallway:

"It's a long story. I say, will you lock that door behind you? Thanks. Whether that Greek was a fool that he should let this slip through his fingers, or whether it was a question of drachmas or whether it was a little of both—idiocy and greed—what does it matter? The vase is here—mine. Well then—"

"But it belongs by right to the Greek government—the Museum of the Acropolis," I protested, weakly enough.

"Naturally, I know," he smiled; "but it does not go to the Greek government nor to the Acropolis. Now why quibble, Twining? You know those things are done every day."

"I did know: in spite of laws, valuable classical pieces were continually turning up in the States; indeed, our own college had purchased specimens of doubtful past.

"How much then?"

"Guess!" And he named a sum that startled me.

"It's a lot," I grumbled; "and look here, Lutz, I expect to be consulted at least in the disposal of the fund. Still, anything within reason for it... a superb nucleus of our collection..."

"Then the thrill of my discovery caught me again: 'Its value is greater than you realize, Lutz. You saw nothing strange in finding a vase by Euphronios in the Persian rubbish? Why, wake up, man! If Euphronios and his contemporaries lived and painted before the Persians, it simply means that the whole chronology of Greek vases must be pushed back half a century. And that's going to mean that Greek painting developed before Greek sculpture, instead of the contrary, as we've always believed. Now do you see! Do you begin to see how this one small vase is going to revolutionize all of our concepts of Greek art? Why, it's colossal! When my article appears—when it's published and quoted and discussed and rediscussed in all the periodicals—"

"Hold on!" commanded Lutz. "We'll not make a splurge of this vase yet. You'll hang off on that article a while—promise me?"

"I don't follow you," I returned stiffening. "Why should I make promises—?"

"But I insist that you shall!"

"And I reply that I won't!"

"Lutz's black eyes narrowed, his face tightened to an expression of hard shrewdness. 'As I see it, your theory depends upon your establishing the fact that the vase came out of that Persian junk; unless you can guarantee that, the whole theory goes smash. I think you'll find no one who'll swear to that. You'd have to swear to it alone. And if it came to a show down, it would be your one word against our several words. Since the thing you're trying to prove is contrary to accepted ideas, the public would find it easier to believe us.'

"But the vase was taken from the Persian debris; you yourself saw it, this very morning!"

"Perhaps."

"Yet you would—lie?"

"Perhaps."

"But why? Can't you grasp it? It means," I reiterated patiently, "a big discovery concerning Greek art, and Greek art is the basis of other arts. You wouldn't keep that knowledge from the world? Oh, you're afraid of losing—but whether the vase goes to a Greek museum or to our museum, is nothing compared to the fact it will establish. You simply don't understand!"

"It's you," said Lutz softly, "who misunderstands. Did I neglect to tell you that I paid for the vase with a check on my own bank?"

"You didn't draw on the fund?"

"No."

"Why—what—?"

"So you see, old top, you haven't been getting me quite straight: this cylix is *my* find!"

"What do you mean?"

"He colored then, beneath his dark skin. 'It's not for the college museum; it's for—my own private museum. I mean to make it the start of the very finest private collection in the States.' He held out his hand for my half of the cup.

"But I drew back, hugged the fragment against my breast. 'Do you stand there and tell me that you're not a scientist at all, but a greedy sensualist? You will remember, Lutz, that you're here for the college, sent by the college—'

"And I've worked like the devil for the college!" he broke in roughly. "I'll continue to work for the college through all the regular channels. But this thing's not regular; it's most—irregular; and the irregularity is my own doing. I'll keep this vase for myself, and I'll suffer my own damnation for it. If you'll kindly hand over that piece—"

"Then I flared: 'I'll do nothing of the sort. If you think you can gag me to silence—force me to sit still and blink at your dirty greed—No, I'll keep this

half as a guarantee to us both that you'll see the light of day and do the right thing!"

"We had it hot then. He had paid for it with his own money, had not touched a penny of the college fund; he had me there.

"But I swore, if he insisted upon taking the fragment from me, that I should report him to Greek authorities who watched that no Greek treasures should go from the country without government sanction.

"That held him. He desisted, even tried to square himself with me. Probably Lutz merely delayed the issue until we should be safely out of Greece. For myself, I was firmly resolved that I should finally prevail upon him; and I did not doubt that I should publish my article and either return the vase to Greece or hand it over to my college museum.

"Meantime, we sailed for home, taking passage, as we had planned, on a small trading vessel that wound a leisurely circle about the Atlantic islands and certain South American ports before it brought up and dropped anchor in New York Bay. The truce still held. Each of us guarded jealously his half of the vase, and each kept aloof from the other.

"It was a childish situation. I tried to tell myself that he was only a willful, spoiled boy, acting in character, but my secret hatred of him grew out of all proportion to the quarrel, which was serious enough, truly.

IV.

"THERE was an implicit understanding between us that the reckoning would come when the ship landed us on home soil. But the ship was destined not to land.

"We were in mid-Atlantic, some eight hundred miles off the Cape Verde Islands and bound for Porto Seguro, when the crash came. It was night, with a heavy gale blowing, and at first I thought the sudden wrench which almost jerked me from my upper berth was a particularly violent wave. Then a grinding and shuddering through all the ship's frame and an abrupt cessation of the engine's throbbing, pulled me stark awake. I hung over the edge of my berth:

"What is it?"

"Don't know," yawned Lutz below, struggling from luxurious sleep. "Better find out—what? 'S a damn nuisance—"

"I groped for the light, and we got into clothes, the ship pitching now so that it was impossible to keep a footing. We spoke no further word, but Lutz paused in drawing on his trousers to take

from beneath his pillow the box which contained his half of the precious vase; and I reached for my own piece, and kept it by me while I finished lacing my shoes. Each of us eyed the other suspiciously; and Lutz was quick to follow me when, with my treasure, I mounted to the ship's deck.

"The little boat wallowed there in the trough of the sea, a dead and passive thing. With its heart stilled, it seemed strangely aloof from the wild sounds of the storm and the shrill cries of men—as a clock which has stopped ticking off the time is aloof from the currents of noisy life which flow past it.

"Apparently the crew had gone wild, and the captain, too, had completely lost his head, for we passed him sobbing on the deck, unable to give us a coherent word. The men were fighting like freshmen in a college rush over life-boats which they were attempting to lower to the water.

"'No chance here,' growled Lutz; 'Lord, let's get out of this mess!'

"I trailed him forward, battling against the wind and the waves which broke over the deck.

"Once I stumbled over a big brute who was on his knees blubbering like a child. I shook him:

"'What did we hit?'

"'Reef. She's a-goin' down, sir—a-goin' down. May the good, kind Lord have mercy—'

"Another time I might have pitied this snivelling creature who could not die like a man, but now I stepped over him, intent upon keeping an eye upon Lutz, even as he was intent upon keeping an eye upon me. Lutz was far forward, clinging to a rail, staring over the ship's side. I reached him, clung with him, and followed his gaze.

"There below us, close against the ship, bobbed a little white dory, looking as frail as an eggshell upon the dim, surging mass of waters; it had been launched probably in the first wild moment, and then abandoned for the heavier, more seaworthy boats.

"'A chance,' spoke Lutz; 'I'll—risk it!'

"He turned to me then, and his eye rested speculatively upon the pocket of my coat which held the vase.

"'No you don't!' I said sharply. 'I'll take that risk with you.'

"We stood measuring each other. It was a contest of wills that threatened any moment to degenerate into a physical struggle. "Oh, I see you are thinking it unlikely"—Twining's long-fingered, nervous, old hand shaded his eyes from the candlelight—"that we two men should have stood there wrestling over

a Greek vase when any moment threatened to plunge us into eternity. But if you can not believe that, young man, then you know nothing of the collector's passion or the scholar's passion.

"We measured each other, I say—oh, quietly. All about us was the terror of the storm—the same wash and slap and snarl that you hear now about this very house; and concentrating upon him, probing him, my heart filled with intense hatred of him, slowly and surely, as a jug that is held under a single stream fills with water—such a hatred as threatened to overflow—a *killing* hatred! There, on just such a night as this, murder was born in me—murder, I tell you!

"The crisis passed. Unexpectedly Lutz gave in:

"'Oh, all right; together still—for a little time—'

"A wave drenched us. We recovered, strained into the darkness to determine whether the little dory had been swamped. But no, she still rode the sea, miraculously right side up.

"'Come along then!' snapped Lutz. 'There's no time to waste.'

"Our time was indeed short. We gathered what store of things we could together, and since the decks of the ship were by this ominously close to the water, the drop into the tossing small dory was easier than it might have been. Lutz took the oars. Some way he had maneuvered us about the bow of the ship, and now we were clear of the sinking vessel, carried swiftly away from it by the sea.

"The rest is a blur. I recall dark shapes—bits of bobbing wreckage—and the white circle of an empty life saver. I did not see the ship go down. One minute there were lights; and the next minute there was darkness over all the ocean, and the human voices had subsided into the voices of wind and water. For the sea itself claimed all my attention, and held it.

"That night was a business of separate, marching waves, with a separate prayer for each wave, that it would not break at the wrong moment. A hundred times I shut my eyes and abandoned hope, and a hundred times I opened them and found us safe. Lutz, an athlete in his day, hung onto the oars, but he was powerless against that surge of water. It was only a miracle which kept us afloat. Our little dory rode the waves like a cork, but still she rode them.

"With the breaking of a sullen dawn, the wind died. The rain settled to a steady downpour, and the waves, as the day wore on, subsided to the long, low rollers that last for hours after such a gale. The gray sea was a vast, unbroken

stretch without a trace of life; perhaps the miracle that had saved our frail boat had not held for those heavier dories . . .

"Anyway, to cut it short, we drifted that day without sight of a single vessel. Wet through and numb with cold, I was glad to take a shift at the oars while Lutz slept. Our hastily gathered provisions were found to consist of half a pail of soda biscuits, a lantern without oil, some miscellaneous ropes and tarpaulins—and that was all!

"We ate sparingly of the biscuits, drank rain water caught in the cracker pail. Our boat, we discovered, was leaking badly through seams in the bow; so we crowded as much weight to the stern of the craft as we could, and I was kept busy bailing out the water.

"Late in the afternoon, when the situation looked worst, we perceived a black speck upon the horizon. The speck grew into a pile of dark rocks—bare and uninhabited, we saw, as the current carried us close. Somehow, we gained the sheltered side of the island, and there, in a narrow inlet, achieved a landing. The mass of rocks was perhaps fourteen hundred feet long and half as wide. It rose abruptly from the sea, a lonely, desolate pile. The only life was sea gulls, insects and spiders, and a few fish in the surrounding waters. We were together there on the island for four days.

"Through all those four days, half-starved and suffering from exposure as we were, Lutz and I nursed each his own half of the cylix and kept a watchful eye upon the other half. The strain of the situation grew intolerable. Now through what follows I don't know how to account for myself; whether it was a fever working in my blood—but no, I was coldly, calculatingly sane as I laid my plans. Yet before that crisis I had never in my life been a vicious man.

"You see, figuring our location from the ship's map as near as I could remember it, I came to believe that this solitary rock was one visited and described by Darwin in his investigation of volcanic islands. If it was the island I believed it to be, then it lay off the ocean lines and was very rarely passed by ships. Our chance of being rescued, if we stayed on the island then, was slight.

"I did not mention these deductions to Lutz. Nor, after Lutz had eaten our last cracker, did I tell him of my own small reserve supply of concentrated meat, which I carried always in my pocket at that time to save the trouble of too frequent meals. At first I did not myself comprehend the drift of my own thoughts.

"Then, on the second night, while Lutz slept under a tarpaulin and while I fought off a twisting hunger, I saw the event quite clearly. Lutz would be the first to succumb to weakness; I would hold on longer than he could. The boat was our best risk, but in its present leaky condition it was unseaworthy for two men. Now *one man*, huddled back in the stern. . . . there was just a chance. And the vase—the *whole* vase—in my possession; and my article secure. . . .

"Deliberately I broke off a piece of the dried meat, which I had not touched until that moment.

"Perhaps I should have weakened in my course and divided my slender provision with him—I do not know. But on the following morning Lutz, sprawled on his stomach over the rock's edge, with his pocketknife tied to a pole, managed to spear a small fish. He did not share with me. Desperate for food, he devoured the thing raw, and the sight nauseated and hardened me.

"I begrudged him the strength he was storing up; but I did not doubt the issue. For all his athletic build, Lutz was soft with soft living. Moreover, my will was stronger than his. So I ate sparingly of my dried meat while Lutz slept, and I maintained a patient watch over the Euphronios fragment which was not yet in my hands.

"Meantime, I kept up some pretense of friendship and good cheer with him. He insisted upon piling up wet drift wood for a fire in case a ship should come our way, and I encouraged him to the effort; though we had no matches, he thought he might manage a spark, and while I knew that this rock was too soft to serve as flint, I agreed with him.

"I watched him burn up energy and grow hourly weaker, and waited. . . . waited. . . .

V.

"**MURDER** was in the air between us, and since those things breed, I wondered that a murdering hatred of me did not spring up in his heart to match my own, and that he did not tackle me there on the rocks and fight it out with me.

"But no—though I sometimes fancied he looked at me oddly, he remained amiable. Lutz was as determined as I to have his way about the vase; beyond that, he was still my friend in his loose, selfish way—my friend as much as he had ever been. As my friend, Lutz, gross and unscrupulous as he was, could never have guessed the thing that was going on in my mind. That was my great sin, the crime that makes me doubly

cursed: it was my friend whom I betrayed—a man who was bound to me in friendship.

"When, on the fourth day, the rain ceased, and a hot, tropical sun blazed out and dried up the pools in the rocks which had furnished our water, I felt myself slipping. The heat on these naked rocks was worse than the chilling rain. A fever grew in me. I could not afford to wait longer. While my companion drowsed in a kind of stupor, I gathered a few things into the boat, stowed my own precious fragment in a concealed nook far up in the bow, and then moved cautiously toward Lutz.

"A dizziness seized me. . . . but I went on. . . . I had rehearsed it all fifty times, you understand, so that I knew every move by heart; and though my memory of the actual events is not clear, I must have gone through with it as I had planned, I suppose I may have awakened him in shoving off the boat, for I have a hazy recollection of a fight.

"And when I came to, alone in the dory, on a calm blue sea, I felt a soreness at my throat, and afterward I was to find black finger marks there, which I carried with me for days. Perhaps I had actually killed him, left him in a heap on the rocks—I couldn't remember. But whether I had murdered him outright with my own hands or not, it did not matter; I had murdered him as surely by abandoning him there on that forgotten island and taking the one chance for myself. I was a murderer by intent and by cold calculation—a murderer of my friend and colleague!"

"And your own fate?" I prompted old "Tinker" Twining gently.

"I was picked up several days later, in a state of semi-consciousness, by a small passenger steamer, just as I had foreseen. In the long voyage home, I lived through nightmares. I felt impelled to confess the truth and to beg the Captain to turn back for Lutz, but I knew that it was now too late. I suffered alone as I deserved to suffer.

"There were nights when I felt my fingers sinking into the flesh of his throat. . . . other nights when I looked at my own hands and could not believe it. My half of the vase—did I tell you that I must somehow have failed to secure Lutz's half, strong as my determination had been, since only this fragment was found in the dory, hidden under the bow where I had placed it? This piece, though I hated it in my reaction, I kept always before me as the reminder, the sackcloth and ashes of my sin.

"The steamer landed me in Boston, and I wandered up here to the Cape. Since the *Agricola* had gone down with

all souls reported lost, I was dead to the world. That was well, for, having murdered my friend for a piece of pottery, I was unfit for human society. The penalty of my crime followed as a natural sequence: to drop out of the world and the work I loved; to read no books and to take no periodicals on my own subject; in short, to give up the thing that was most vital to me. That would be prison for me—a prison worse than most criminals ever know.

"I found this remote house, got in touch with my lawyer at home, and, having pledged him to secrecy, arranged that my small, yearly income should be paid regularly to a T. Twining at this address. I had no close relatives, and the old lawyer has long since died, leaving my affairs in the hands of an incurious younger partner. There was no hitch.

"So I settled here, and eked out my income with this painting. Though I fixed my own terms of imprisonment, I have lived up to them. In all those forty years I have permitted myself no inquiries and I have heard no news of anyone I ever knew in the old days. I have virtually buried myself alive.

"Ah, you are thinking it wrong of me to have buried, too, the half of this valuable cylix, since, fragment though it is, it would have been sufficient to establish the fact. Perhaps it *was* wrong. But, don't you see, I could establish nothing without first revealing my identity and giving my word as a scientist that the shard came from the Persian debris? That way lay danger—the danger of being drawn back into the old life; there, too, lay honor for me who deserved nothing but contempt.

"And always in the background there was Lorna Story. No, the temptations were too many; I could not risk it. But I have bequeathed that knowledge to posterity; I have left a written confession and a statement. Tell me—you have recently come out of the world—you don't think it will be too late after my death, do you?"

Though I had some shadowy idea of what extensive excavations and what far-reaching discoveries had been made in the classical world of recent years, I assured the old man that it would perhaps not be too late. I had not the heart to rob him of the little outworn theory that he hugged close.

"And so," he concluded his story, "you see before you a murderer! Your verdict would be—?"

"But how can you be sure?" I countered. "If you slipped up on the vase, you may have slipped up on other details of your program. Besides, his

chance on the island was as good as yours in a leaking dory. Who shall say?"

Old Twining merely shook his head. He returned again to the glowing fragment on the table between us.

"Ah, you are thinking that the vase is my consolation—that I wanted to keep it. And perhaps I did," he owned wistfully. "I swear to you I abhor the deed it stands for, but I can no more help loving it in itself—"

He lost himself, wandered off once more into the fine points of his treasure.

But the wind rose up again, and the old man's head dropped to his hands. I was with him all that night and I saw him suffer the tortures of an eternally damned soul with a razor blade conscience.

The storm over, he was the kindly, considerate host when he bade me good-bye on the following morning. I left him with the feeling that I had been in the presence of as fine a gentleman as I had ever met; that his story of the preceding night was utterly incongruous to the man as he was. It would be a physical impossibility, I protested, for that gentle old scholar to harm an insect.

His mind had wandered at times: could it be that he was suffering some kind of an hallucination, the result, perhaps, of an overacute conscience? I believed there was some factor to his story which I had not got hold of, and I promised myself to visit him again.

VI.

BUT time passed. I was abroad in England and in France. Then two years later, back again in New York, I picked up the missing link in the old scholar's story:

It was inevitable, I suppose, that, as buyer for the House of Harrow, I should sooner or later stumble into Max Bauer. At a private sale I lazily bid against the wealthy collector for a jade bowl and good-naturedly lost to him. I talked with him, and when he urged me to dine with him that evening and see his treasures, I assented.

I don't know why I accepted his invitation, for I did not like the man; but I was mildly curious about his collection, and alone in the city in midsummer, I welcomed any diversion.

So he dined me and wined me—especially the latter—to repleteness in the ornate dining-room of his luxurious apartment, which was after the manner of a banquet hall. I watched him pick apart the bird that was set before him, and found something cannibalistic in the performance; and I watched him

again over a rich mousse, and liked him less and less. His hand was always upon a bottle; he gave me no peace—urged things upon me, made a show of his food and his service.

The meal over, still keeping the decanter by him, he trailed me through rooms littered with oriental junk. He bragged and boasted, told the history of this piece and that: how he had robbed one man here and tricked another there. His voice thickened, as his enthusiasm grew, and I turned thoroughly uncomfortable and wondered when I could break away.

Clearly the man attracted few friends of a caliber to appreciate his art treasures, for under my perfunctory approval, he became increasingly garrulous, until at last he invited me into the inner shrine, the small room which held his most private and precious possessions.

We stopped before a water color painting of a slim girl in gray.

"My wife," said old Bauer with a flourish; "her last portrait."

I turned incredulously from that white-flower face, with its fine, subtle smile, half-ironical and half-tired, to my gross-featured host—and I shuddered.

"A handsome woman," he mumbled; "picture doesn't do her justice. Face so-so, but a body. . . . a body for an artist to paint. . . ."

I looked away from him—followed the gray girl's eyes to the object below her upon which she ironically smiled: it was a red-figured Greek vase, and I remember thinking that this man must have changed—that his taste, his very life, must have degenerated, like the retrogression from the fine to the decadent, since such a girl had married him.

Then something familiar in the vase struck me—like the broken pattern of a forgotten dream. . . . It was the fragment of a vase, the half of a cylix, on which an orange goddess stood with uplifted spear.

"Ah," I breathed, "the Athena—Euphronios!"

"So you're up to it!" chuckled old Bauer. "Not many of 'em are. Classic stuff: I used to aim for a collection of the pure Greek, but I've grown out of that; not that I wouldn't have achieved it if my taste hadn't changed, y'understand, for I'm generally successful—I get the things I set out for. This"—he scowled at the vase—"is my one failure. But there's a story"—he poured himself another whisky (to my infinite relief forgot to press me) "want to hear it, eh?"

I looked at him carefully: the plump fingers; the full, sensual lips; the dark

skin and the nose—probably Jewish blood. What was the name?—Lutz, that was it!

Decidedly I did want to hear his story!

VII.

"**M**Y ONE failure," he emphasized it, slumping into a chair. "Not my fault, either; the fault of a stuffy old fool. He doted on me, played the fatherly role, and I tolerated him as you will such folks. I cribbed a lot off of him; I was keen on the classics at that time, and he knew a thing or two.

"Besides, he was sweet on Lorna, and you never could tell about her—odd tastes; it was best to keep track of him. We traveled together for the college—you'd never guess I'd been a college professor in my day, would you? I happened onto this thing quite by luck—a genuine Euphronios, broken clean in two pieces. I wanted it, and I managed it. This fellow—old Gooding—had a notion of turning it in to the college museum; he had some other fool's idea of proving something-or-other—a rare old bird, a pedant, you understand. It was a shaky business; I'd no intention of publishing my Euphronios at this time. But he was set—you'd never believe how set!—and since I couldn't afford to stir up a row there in Athens, I humored him.

"Once we were clear of Greece—once we struck home ground—But we never struck home ground on that ship. She went down!"—with a flourish of his glass. "Yes, dammit all, regular desert island stuff. We were hung up on a rock in mid-ocean, the two of us, old Gooding hugging tight to half the vase, and me nursing the other half. Can't say I ever was more damned uncomfortable in my life.

"He had this eccentric idea of honor and he had it hard like religion, and he hung on like a bull dog. It was war between us. Oh, he doted upon me right enough, still insisted upon the paternal role, but I'd no intention of letting him pull this thing."

Again Bauer fumbled for the bottle, spilled whisky into his glass.

"The old idiot—you'd think he'd've seen what he was driving me to, but not him. I had a couple of matches in my pocket—I'd held out on him, y'understand. And I'd built up a pile of driftwood for a signal fire to the first ship that passed. But I'd no notion of saving him too. No, I had a contrary notion of setting him adrift in the dory.

"Oh, it was easy: he'd gone weaker than a cat, y'understand—all gray matter an' no physh—physhique, ol' Cheever Gooding. I'd take my chances on the

island with a heap of dry wood an' two matches for a li'l bonfire, an' with the c-cup, both pieces of it safe.

"Murder?"—Bauer laughed. "'S'n ugly word, eh?" He pursued with an uncertain finger an injured fly which crawled across his trousers leg. "Bah, they say this man kills for hate, that for love—all good, noble motives. But your true collector—you 'n' me—kills for a c-cup. Killing's natural—th'easiest thing in the world—when you're preshed for time.

"'N I was preshed for time, see? There was a ship out there—I saw the smoke. I got him into the dory, but it was a fight; there was life in the ol' bird yet, though the sun'd laid him low. Leaky boat—not much chance for him—still I'd be sure. I choked him gently—oh, quite gently—like thish,"—Bauer demonstrated by crushing the fly very thoroughly between his thumb and forefinger—"till the breath was gone from him. Then I looked for th'other half o' the vashe—couldn't find it. The smoke was close—couldn't wait. P'raps he's hid it in the rocks, I shay. So I shoves him off, an' the tide carries him 'way from the ship's smoke—bob-bobbin' away.

"I runs up an' sends my twigs a-blazin' to the sky. 'N I searches everywhere for the c-cup—in every crack—an' no luck! Guns shalute—ship's comin'; li'l dory bobs off there a mere sun spot; still no luck. Can you beat it? All my work for nothing! 'Cause, see, I'd murdered him—an' what for? Damn him, his skin's too cheap—

"Say, you're not leavin'? My one failure—I've had everything else: Lorna an' thish here c-c'lection—everything! But this one li'l broken c-cup—too bad—too bad—"

I left him caressing the vase with his hands as old "Tinker" Twining had caressed it with his eyes. But before I went, my gaze fell again upon the painting of Bauer's wife, and I remembered the other man's words for her: "A beautiful mind, and a light shining through her gray eyes that was like the haunting line of a poem."

"Body love and soul love," I muttered.

Bauer sought me out the following morning.

"What did I tell you last night?" he asked.

I told him briefly.

"Fiction!" he shrugged with an uneasy laugh. "I get to running on—You'll—forget it?"

I was ready for him.

"Yes," I agreed, "I'll forget it—on one condition: that you run down to the

Cape with me to—pass judgment on an antique; to give me your honest, expert advice—free of charge."

He consented at once, the connoisseur in him aroused.

VIII.

SO WE came down to the Cape on a clear blue morning after rains.

I made inquiries at the village concerning old "Tinker" Twining, and was prepared for what I found. I had come in time, a woman told me; she was troubled about him, though, since he would allow no one to stop in the house and care for him.

We took the trail over to the back shore; and I held Bauer off, answered his questions vaguely. It was a different day from that sullen one on which I had first walked this path: an exquisite morning, requiring you to capture the shine of each separate leaf—the upward-tossed, silver poplar leaves and the varnished oak leaves—if you would adequately describe it.

This meeting I had planned solely for the sake of the old scholar; if, in aiding Twining to clear his conscience, I also cleared the conscience of Max Bauer, that I could not help. But Bauer, I assured myself, had no conscience; one way or the other, it would not matter to him.

Still, it was a situation without parallel, I thought: two men, each living, and each believing himself to have murdered the other. And to bring those two men together, face to face, would be smashing drama!

But life is seldom as spectacular as we anticipate; my fireworks fizzled. Beyond a stretch of beach grass,—running silver under the sunlight—and humped up there precariously over sands, stood the same little rusty gray house. The door was half open, and the work-bench was deserted. We found the old man in a bedroom over the sea, lying in a black walnut bed under a patchwork quilt.

He was propped up on pillows, and the worn face was silhouetted against the ocean, blue today with pale sweepings, and flowing out to silver under the sun. The elderly scholar was delirious, his mind wandering over that old sin; he was still paying the penalty for a murder of the imagination.

"My friend," he muttered; "the man who was bound to me in friendship—certain death—"

"Listen!" I said. "This is Max Bauer, the man you thought you killed! You didn't murder him; you only *thought* you did. He's here safe—look!"

But the other did not grasp it; only repeated the name "Max Bauer," and turned away with a long shudder.

Then Bauer was chattering at my shoulder:

"Gooding—old Cheever Gooding himself!"

"Perhaps that's what *you* called him—the man you strangled—It's no use—no earthly use; he's still under the illusion—we can never make it clear to him now."

"But how—?" I turned impatiently at Bauer's insistence, gave him curtly and succinctly, in four sentences, the clues he had missed.

He sat there. "So he tried to murder me! The old—skunk!"

And later, "B'God," he whispered, "how he's gone! A shadow. . . ."

I looked at Bauer, sitting corpulent and gross.

"Yes," I replied, "a shadow."

But already Bauer's eyes had roved from Twining to a thing on the quilt which he had missed in the patchwork colors, a thing of orange and black.

"Lord, it's the missing half!" he exclaimed, and now there was genuine feeling in his voice.

I stood between Bauer and that object, guarding Twining's treasure. And still I tried to give old Twining back his clear conscience.

"It's Max Bauer," I insinuated, "Max Bauer."

I must have got it across, for as Bauer edged closer and as I seized the shard, the old man stared at that sensual, dark face with an expression of recognition. There must have come to him then some inkling of the situation.

"Yes," he whispered, "let him have it."

He took the fragment from me, held it up tenderly for a moment in his two frail, fine old hands, and then placed it in the thick hands of Max Bauer. Bauer closed upon it greedily.

"Murdered him!" moaned Twining.

"Murdered me nothing," chuckled Bauer, who could now, with the vase in his grasp, afford to be generous. "'S all right, old man; we're quits."

But Twining was fumbling for a piece of paper.

"This!" he breathed. "Tell them where—painting before sculpture—"

"But great Caesar, they've known all this for forty years!" exploded Bauer, scanning the written statement. "Why, they found fragments of another Euphronios in that same Persian dirt heap; some one else proved that very thing, and the Lord knows how many other things. Just fragments though, y'understand—not a perfect one like this." Bauer let

the paper flutter from his hands; I quietly picked up Twining's written confession and later dropped it into the stove. The old man relapsed into his former state of wandering misery, with apparently no recollection of the episode.

Bauer left soon after that.

"A good day for me, and I owe it all to you, Van Nuys—My thanks," he made

genial acknowledgment from the doorway.

I choked on my disgust of him. So Max Bauer, whom only circumstances outside of himself had saved from actual murder, went up to the city, successful and carefree, to add to his many treasures old "Tinker" Twining's one treasure.

I stayed with the old scholar, whose every instinct would have held him from the murder he had planned, and watched him wear himself out, suffering to the last breath for his one mental sin.

That is why I hope, at the final reckoning, God will take some account of the sensitiveness of the souls he weighs, and will fix his penalties accordingly.