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The Man Who Knew Too Much

By

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Chapter I. THE FACE IN THE TARGET

Harold March, the rising reviewer and social critic, was walking vigorously across a great tableland of moors and commons, the horizon of which was fringed with the far-off woods of the famous estate of Torwood Park. He was a good-looking young man in tweeds, with very pale curly hair and pale clear eyes. Walking in wind and sun in the very landscape of liberty, he was still young enough to remember his politics and not merely try to forget them. For his errand at Torwood Park was a political one; it was the place of appointment named by no less a person than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Howard Horne, then introducing his so-called Socialist budget, and prepared to expound it in an interview with so promising a penman. Harold March was the sort of man who knows everything about politics, and nothing about politicians. He also knew a great deal about art, letters, philosophy, and general culture; about almost everything, indeed, except the world he was living in.

Abruptly, in the middle of those sunny and windy flats, he came upon a sort of cleft almost narrow enough to be called a crack in the land. It was just large enough to be the water-course for a small stream which vanished at intervals under green tunnels of undergrowth, as if in a dwarfish forest. Indeed, he had an odd feeling as if he were a giant looking over the valley of the pygmies. When he dropped into the hollow, however, the impression was lost; the rocky banks, though hardly above the height of a cottage, hung over and had the profile of a precipice. As he began to wander down the course of the stream, in idle but romantic curiosity, and saw the water shining in short strips between the great gray boulders and bushes as soft as great green mosses, he fell into quite an opposite vein of fantasy. It was rather as if the earth had opened and swallowed him into a sort of underworld of dreams. And when he became conscious of a human figure dark against the silver stream, sitting on a large boulder and looking rather like a large bird, it was perhaps with some of the premonitions proper to a man who meets the strangest friendship of his life.

The man was apparently fishing; or at least was fixed in a fisherman's attitude with more than a fisherman's immobility. March was able to examine the man almost as if he had been a statue for some minutes before the statue spoke. He was a tall, fair man, cadaverous, and a little lackadaisical, with heavy eyelids and a highbridged nose. When his face was shaded with his wide white hat, his light mustache and lithe figure gave him a look of youth. But the Panama lay on the moss beside him; and the spectator could see that his brow was prematurely bald; and this, combined with a certain hollowness about the eyes, had an air of headwork and even headache. But the most curious thing about him, realized

after a short scrutiny, was that, though he looked like a fisherman, he was not fishing.

He was holding, instead of a rod, something that might have been a landing-net which some fishermen use, but which was much more like the ordinary toy net which children carry, and which they generally use indifferently for shrimps or butterflies. He was dipping this into the water at intervals, gravely regarding its harvest of weed or mud, and emptying it out again.

"No, I haven't caught anything," he remarked, calmly, as if answering an unspoken query. "When I do I have to throw it back again; especially the big fish. But some of the little beasts interest me when I get 'em."

"A scientific interest, I suppose?" observed March.

"Of a rather amateurish sort, I fear," answered the strange fisherman. "I have a sort of hobby about what they call 'phenomena of phosphorescence.' But it would be rather awkward to go about in society carrying stinking fish."

"I suppose it would," said March, with a smile.

"Rather odd to enter a drawing-room carrying a large luminous cod," continued the stranger, in his listless way. "How quaint it would be if one could carry it about like a lantern, or have little sprats for candles. Some of the seabests would really be very pretty like lampshades; the blue sea-snail that glitters all over like starlight; and some of the red starfish really shine like red stars. But, naturally, I'm not looking for them here."

March thought of asking him what he was looking for; but, feeling unequal to a technical discussion at least as deep as the deep-sea fishes, he returned to more ordinary topics.

"Delightful sort of hole this is," he said. "This little dell and river here. It's like those places Stevenson talks about, where something ought to happen."

"I know," answered the other. "I think it's because the place itself, so to speak, seems to happen and not merely to exist. Perhaps that's what old Picasso and some of the Cubists are trying to express by angles and jagged lines. Look at that wall like low cliffs that juts forward just at right angles to the slope of turf sweeping up to it. That's like a silent collision. It's like a breaker and the back-wash of a wave."

March looked at the low-browed crag overhanging the green slope and nodded. He was interested in a man who turned so easily from the technicalities of science to those of art; and asked him if he admired the new angular artists.

"As I feel it, the Cubists are not Cubist enough," replied the stranger. "I mean they're not thick enough. By making things mathematical they make them thin. Take the living lines out of that landscape, simplify it to a right angle, and you flatten it out to a mere diagram on paper. Diagrams have their own beauty; but it is of just the other sort. They stand for the unalterable things; the calm, eternal, mathematical sort of truths; what somebody calls the 'white radiance of--'"

He stopped, and before the next word came something had happened almost too quickly and completely to be realized. From behind the overhanging rock came a noise and rush like that of a railway train; and a great motor car appeared. It topped the crest of cliff, black against the sun, like a battle-chariot rushing to destruction in some wild epic. March automatically put out his hand in one futile gesture, as if to catch a falling tea-cup in a drawing-room.

For the fraction of a flash it seemed to leave the ledge of rock like a flying ship; then the very sky seemed to turn over like a wheel, and it lay a ruin amid the tall grasses below, a line of gray smoke going up slowly from it into the silent air. A little lower the figure of a man with gray hair lay tumbled down the steep green slope, his limbs lying all at random, and his face turned away.

The eccentric fisherman dropped his net and walked swiftly toward the spot, his new acquaintance following him. As they drew near there seemed a sort of monstrous irony in the fact that the dead machine was still throbbing and thundering as busily as a factory, while the man lay so still.

He was unquestionably dead. The blood flowed in the grass from a hopelessly fatal fracture at the back of the skull; but the face, which was turned to the sun, was uninjured and strangely arresting in itself. It was one of those cases of a strange face so unmistakable as to feel familiar. We feel, somehow, that we ought to recognize it, even though we do not. It was of the broad, square sort with great jaws, almost like that of a highly intellectual ape; the wide mouth shut so tight as to be traced by a mere line; the nose short with the sort of nostrils that seem to gape with an appetite for the air. The oddest thing about the face was that one of the eyebrows was cocked up at a much sharper angle than the other. March thought he had never seen a face so naturally alive as that dead one. And its ugly energy seemed all the stranger for its halo of hoary hair. Some papers lay half fallen out of the pocket, and from among them March extracted a card-case. He read the name on the card aloud.

"Sir Humphrey Turnbull. I'm sure I've heard that name somewhere."

His companion only gave a sort of a little sigh and was silent for a moment, as if ruminating, then he merely said, "The poor fellow is quite gone," and added some scientific terms in which his auditor once more found himself out of his depth.

"As things are," continued the same curiously well-informed person, "it will be more legal for us to leave the body as it is until the police are informed. In fact, I think it will be well if nobody except the police is informed. Don't be surprised if I seem to be keeping it dark from some of our neighbors round here." Then, as if prompted to regularize his rather abrupt confidence, he said: "I've come down to see my cousin at Torwood; my name is Horne Fisher. Might be a pun on my pottering about here, mightn't it?"

"Is Sir Howard Horne your cousin?" asked March. "I'm going to Torwood Park to see him myself; only about his public work, of course, and the wonderful stand he is making for his principles. I think this Budget is the greatest thing in English history. If it fails, it will be the most heroic failure in English history. Are you an admirer of your great kinsman, Mr. Fisher?"

"Rather," said Mr. Fisher. "He's the best shot I know."

Then, as if sincerely repentant of his nonchalance, he added, with a sort of enthusiasm:

"No, but really, he's a beautiful shot."

As if fired by his own words, he took a sort of leap at the ledges of the rock above him, and scaled them with a sudden agility in startling contrast to his general lassitude. He had stood for some seconds on the headland above, with his aquiline profile under the Panama hat relieved against the sky and peering over the countryside before his companion had collected himself sufficiently to scramble up after him.

The level above was a stretch of common turf on which the tracks of the fated car were plowed plainly enough; but the brink of it was broken as with rocky teeth; broken boulders of all shapes and sizes lay near the edge; it was almost incredible that any one could have deliberately driven into such a death trap, especially in broad daylight.

"I can't make head or tail of it," said March. "Was he blind? Or blind drunk?"

"Neither, by the look of him," replied the other.

"Then it was suicide."

"It doesn't seem a cozy way of doing it," remarked the man called Fisher. "Besides, I don't fancy poor old Puggy would commit suicide, somehow."

"Poor old who?" inquired the wondering journalist. "Did you know this unfortunate man?"

"Nobody knew him exactly," replied Fisher, with some vagueness. "But one knew him, of course. He'd been a terror in his time, in Parliament and the courts, and so on; especially in that row about the aliens who were deported as undesirables, when he wanted one of 'em hanged for murder. He was so sick about it that he retired from the bench. Since then he mostly motored about by himself; but he was coming to Torwood, too, for the week-end; and I don't see why he should deliberately break his neck almost at the very door. I believe Hoggs--I mean my cousin Howard--was coming down specially to meet him."

"Torwood Park doesn't belong to your cousin?" inquired March.

"No; it used to belong to the Winthrops, you know," replied the other. "Now a new man's got it; a man from Montreal named Jenkins. Hoggs comes for the shooting; I told you he was a lovely shot."

This repeated eulogy on the great social statesman affected Harold March as if somebody had defined Napoleon as a distinguished player of nap. But he had another half-formed impression struggling in this flood of unfamiliar things, and he brought it to the surface before it could vanish.

"Jenkins," he repeated. "Surely you don't mean Jefferson Jenkins, the social reformer? I mean the man who's fighting for the new cottage-estate scheme. It would be as interesting to meet him as any Cabinet Minister in the world, if you'll excuse my saying so."

"Yes; Hoggs told him it would have to be cottages," said Fisher. "He said the breed of cattle had improved too often, and people were beginning to laugh. And, of course, you must hang a peerage on to something; though the poor chap hasn't got it yet. Hullo, here's somebody else."

They had started walking in the tracks of the car, leaving it behind them in the hollow, still humming horribly like a huge insect that had killed a man. The tracks took them to the corner of the road, one arm of which went on in the same line toward the distant gates of the park. It was clear that the car had been driven

down the long straight road, and then, instead of turning with the road to the left, had gone straight on over the turf to its doom. But it was not this discovery that had riveted Fisher's eye, but something even more solid. At the angle of the white road a dark and solitary figure was standing almost as still as a finger post. It was that of a big man in rough shooting-clothes, bareheaded, and with tousled curly hair that gave him a rather wild look. On a nearer approach this first more fantastic impression faded; in a full light the figure took on more conventional colors, as of an ordinary gentleman who happened to have come out without a hat and without very studiously brushing his hair. But the massive stature remained, and something deep and even cavernous about the setting of the eyes redeemed his animal good looks from the commonplace. But March had no time to study the man more closely, for, much to his astonishment, his guide merely observed, "Hullo, Jack!" and walked past him as if he had indeed been a signpost, and without attempting to inform him of the catastrophe beyond the rocks. It was relatively a small thing, but it was only the first in a string of singular antics on which his new and eccentric friend was leading him.

The man they had passed looked after them in rather a suspicious fashion, but Fisher continued serenely on his way along the straight road that ran past the gates of the great estate.

"That's John Burke, the traveler," he condescended to explain. "I expect you've heard of him; shoots big game and all that. Sorry I couldn't stop to introduce you, but I dare say you'll meet him later on."

"I know his book, of course," said March, with renewed interest. "That is certainly a fine piece of description, about their being only conscious of the closeness of the elephant when the colossal head blocked out the moon."

"Yes, young Halkett writes jolly well, I think. What? Didn't you know Halkett wrote Burke's book for him? Burke can't use anything except a gun; and you can't write with that. Oh, he's genuine enough in his way, you know, as brave as a lion, or a good deal braver by all accounts."

"You seem to know all about him," observed March, with a rather bewildered laugh, "and about a good many other people."

Fisher's bald brow became abruptly corrugated, and a curious expression came into his eyes.

"I know too much," he said. "That's what's the matter with me. That's what's the matter with all of us, and the whole show; we know too much. Too much about one another; too much about ourselves. That's why I'm really interested, just

now, about one thing that I don't know."

"And that is?" inquired the other.

"Why that poor fellow is dead."

They had walked along the straight road for nearly a mile, conversing at intervals in this fashion; and March had a singular sense of the whole world being turned inside out. Mr. Horne Fisher did not especially abuse his friends and relatives in fashionable society; of some of them he spoke with affection. But they seemed to be an entirely new set of men and women, who happened to have the same nerves as the men and women mentioned most often in the newspapers. Yet no fury of revolt could have seemed to him more utterly revolutionary than this cold familiarity. It was like daylight on the other side of stage scenery.

They reached the great lodge gates of the park, and, to March's surprise, passed them and continued along the interminable white, straight road. But he was himself too early for his appointment with Sir Howard, and was not disinclined to see the end of his new friend's experiment, whatever it might be. They had long left the moorland behind them, and half the white road was gray in the great shadow of the Torwood pine forests, themselves like gray bars shuttered against the sunshine and within, amid that clear noon, manufacturing their own midnight. Soon, however, rifts began to appear in them like gleams of colored windows; the trees thinned and fell away as the road went forward, showing the wild, irregular copses in which, as Fisher said, the house-party had been blazing away all day. And about two hundred yards farther on they came to the first turn of the road.

At the corner stood a sort of decayed inn with the dingy sign of The Grapes. The signboard was dark and indecipherable by now, and hung black against the sky and the gray moorland beyond, about as inviting as a gallows. March remarked that it looked like a tavern for vinegar instead of wine.

"A good phrase," said Fisher, "and so it would be if you were silly enough to drink wine in it. But the beer is very good, and so is the brandy."

March followed him to the bar parlor with some wonder, and his dim sense of repugnance was not dismissed by the first sight of the innkeeper, who was widely different from the genial innkeepers of romance, a bony man, very silent behind a black mustache, but with black, restless eyes. Taciturn as he was, the investigator succeeded at last in extracting a scrap of information from him, by dint of ordering beer and talking to him persistently and minutely on the subject of motor cars. He evidently regarded the innkeeper as in some singular way an

authority on motor cars; as being deep in the secrets of the mechanism, management, and mismanagement of motor cars; holding the man all the time with a glittering eye like the Ancient Mariner. Out of all this rather mysterious conversation there did emerge at last a sort of admission that one particular motor car, of a given description, had stopped before the inn about an hour before, and that an elderly man had alighted, requiring some mechanical assistance. Asked if the visitor required any other assistance, the innkeeper said shortly that the old gentleman had filled his flask and taken a packet of sandwiches. And with these words the somewhat inhospitable host had walked hastily out of the bar, and they heard him banging doors in the dark interior.

Fisher's weary eye wandered round the dusty and dreary inn parlor and rested dreamily on a glass case containing a stuffed bird, with a gun hung on hooks above it, which seemed to be its only ornament.

"Puggy was a humorist," he observed, "at least in his own rather grim style. But it seems rather too grim a joke for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he is just going to commit suicide."

"If you come to that," answered March, "it isn't very usual for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he's just outside the door of a grand house he's going to stop at."

"No . . . no," repeated Fisher, almost mechanically; and then suddenly cocked his eye at his interlocutor with a much livelier expression.

"By Jove! that's an idea. You're perfectly right. And that suggests a very queer idea, doesn't it?"

There was a silence, and then March started with irrational nervousness as the door of the inn was flung open and another man walked rapidly to the counter. He had struck it with a coin and called out for brandy before he saw the other two guests, who were sitting at a bare wooden table under the window. When he turned about with a rather wild stare, March had yet another unexpected emotion, for his guide hailed the man as Higgs and introduced him as Sir Howard Horne.

He looked rather older than his boyish portraits in the illustrated papers, as is the way of politicians; his flat, fair hair was touched with gray, but his face was almost comically round, with a Roman nose which, when combined with his quick, bright eyes, raised a vague reminiscence of a parrot. He had a cap rather at the back of his head and a gun under his arm. Harold March had imagined many things about his meeting with the great political reformer, but he had never

pictured him with a gun under his arm, drinking brandy in a public house.

"So you're stopping at Jink's, too," said Fisher. "Everybody seems to be at Jink's."

"Yes," replied the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "Jolly good shooting. At least all of it that isn't Jink's shooting. I never knew a chap with such good shooting that was such a bad shot. Mind you, he's a jolly good fellow and all that; I don't say a word against him. But he never learned to hold a gun when he was packing pork or whatever he did. They say he shot the cockade off his own servant's hat; just like him to have cockades, of course. He shot the weathercock off his own ridiculous gilded summerhouse. It's the only cock he'll ever kill, I should think. Are you coming up there now?"

Fisher said, rather vaguely, that he was following soon, when he had fixed something up; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer left the inn. March fancied he had been a little upset or impatient when he called for the brandy; but he had talked himself back into a satisfactory state, if the talk had not been quite what his literary visitor had expected. Fisher, a few minutes afterward, slowly led the way out of the tavern and stood in the middle of the road, looking down in the direction from which they had traveled. Then he walked back about two hundred yards in that direction and stood still again.

"I should think this is about the place," he said.

"What place?" asked his companion.

"The place where the poor fellow was killed," said Fisher, sadly.

"What do you mean?" demanded March.

"He was smashed up on the rocks a mile and a half from here."

"No, he wasn't," replied Fisher. "He didn't fall on the rocks at all. Didn't you notice that he only fell on the slope of soft grass underneath? But I saw that he had a bullet in him already."

Then after a pause he added:

"He was alive at the inn, but he was dead long before he came to the rocks. So he was shot as he drove his car down this strip of straight road, and I should think somewhere about here. After that, of course, the car went straight on with nobody to stop or turn it. It's really a very cunning dodge in its way; for the body would

be found far away, and most people would say, as you do, that it was an accident to a motorist. The murderer must have been a clever brute."

"But wouldn't the shot be heard at the inn or somewhere?" asked March.

"It would be heard. But it would not be noticed. That," continued the investigator, "is where he was clever again. Shooting was going on all over the place all day; very likely he timed his shot so as to drown it in a number of others. Certainly he was a first-class criminal. And he was something else as well."

"What do you mean?" asked his companion, with a creepy premonition of something coming, he knew not why.

"He was a first-class shot," said Fisher. He had turned his back abruptly and was walking down a narrow, grassy lane, little more than a cart track, which lay opposite the inn and marked the end of the great estate and the beginning of the open moors. March plodded after him with the same idle perseverance, and found him staring through a gap in giant weeds and thorns at the flat face of a painted paling. From behind the paling rose the great gray columns of a row of poplars, which filled the heavens above them with dark-green shadow and shook faintly in a wind which had sunk slowly into a breeze. The afternoon was already deepening into evening, and the titanic shadows of the poplars lengthened over a third of the landscape.

"Are you a first-class criminal?" asked Fisher, in a friendly tone. "I'm afraid I'm not. But I think I can manage to be a sort of fourth-rate burglar."

And before his companion could reply he had managed to swing himself up and over the fence; March followed without much bodily effort, but with considerable mental disturbance. The poplars grew so close against the fence that they had some difficulty in slipping past them, and beyond the poplars they could see only a high hedge of laurel, green and lustrous in the level sun. Something in this limitation by a series of living walls made him feel as if he were really entering a shattered house instead of an open field. It was as if he came in by a disused door or window and found the way blocked by furniture. When they had circumvented the laurel hedge, they came out on a sort of terrace of turf, which fell by one green step to an oblong lawn like a bowling green. Beyond this was the only building in sight, a low conservatory, which seemed far away from anywhere, like a glass cottage standing in its own fields in fairyland. Fisher knew that lonely look of the outlying parts of a great house well enough. He realized that it is more of a satire on aristocracy than if it were choked with weeds and littered with ruins. For it is not neglected and yet it is deserted; at any rate, it is disused. It is regularly swept and garnished for a master who never comes.

Looking over the lawn, however, he saw one object which he had not apparently expected. It was a sort of tripod supporting a large disk like the round top of a table tipped sideways, and it was not until they had dropped on to the lawn and walked across to look at it that March realized that it was a target. It was worn and weatherstained; the gay colors of its concentric rings were faded; possibly it had been set up in those far-off Victorian days when there was a fashion of archery. March had one of his vague visions of ladies in cloudy crinolines and gentlemen in outlandish hats and whiskers revisiting that lost garden like ghosts.

Fisher, who was peering more closely at the target, startled him by an exclamation.

"Hullo!" he said. "Somebody has been peppering this thing with shot, after all, and quite lately, too. Why, I believe old Jink's been trying to improve his bad shooting here."

"Yes, and it looks as if it still wanted improving," answered March, laughing. "Not one of these shots is anywhere near the bull's-eye; they seem just scattered about in the wildest way."

"In the wildest way," repeated Fisher, still peering intently at the target. He seemed merely to assent, but March fancied his eye was shining under its sleepy lid and that he straightened his stooping figure with a strange effort.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, feeling in his pockets. "I think I've got some of my chemicals; and after that we'll go up to the house." And he stooped again over the target, putting something with his finger over each of the shot-holes, so far as March could see merely a dull-gray smear. Then they went through the gathering twilight up the long green avenues to the great house.

Here again, however, the eccentric investigator did not enter by the front door. He walked round the house until he found a window open, and, leaping into it, introduced his friend to what appeared to be the gun-room. Rows of the regular instruments for bringing down birds stood against the walls; but across a table in the window lay one or two weapons of a heavier and more formidable pattern.

"Hullo! these are Burke's big-game rifles," said Fisher. "I never knew he kept them here." He lifted one of them, examined it briefly, and put it down again, frowning heavily. Almost as he did so a strange young man came hurriedly into the room. He was dark and sturdy, with a bumpy forehead and a bulldog jaw, and he spoke with a curt apology.

"I left Major Burke's guns here," he said, "and he wants them packed up. He's going away to-night."

And he carried off the two rifles without casting a glance at the stranger; through the open window they could see his short, dark figure walking away across the glimmering garden. Fisher got out of the window again and stood looking after him.

"That's Halkett, whom I told you about," he said. "I knew he was a sort of secretary and had to do with Burke's papers; but I never knew he had anything to do with his guns. But he's just the sort of silent, sensible little devil who might be very good at anything; the sort of man you know for years before you find he's a chess champion."

He had begun to walk in the direction of the disappearing secretary, and they soon came within sight of the rest of the house-party talking and laughing on the lawn. They could see the tall figure and loose mane of the lion-hunter dominating the little group.

"By the way," observed Fisher, "when we were talking about Burke and Halkett, I said that a man couldn't very well write with a gun. Well, I'm not so sure now. Did you ever hear of an artist so clever that he could draw with a gun? There's a wonderful chap loose about here."

Sir Howard hailed Fisher and his friend the journalist with almost boisterous amiability. The latter was presented to Major Burke and Mr. Halkett and also (by way of a parenthesis) to his host, Mr. Jenkins, a commonplace little man in loud tweeds, whom everybody else seemed to treat with a sort of affection, as if he were a baby.

The irrepressible Chancellor of the Exchequer was still talking about the birds he had brought down, the birds that Burke and Halkett had brought down, and the birds that Jenkins, their host, had failed to bring down. It seemed to be a sort of sociable monomania.

"You and your big game," he ejaculated, aggressively, to Burke. "Why, anybody could shoot big game. You want to be a shot to shoot small game."

"Quite so," interposed Horne Fisher. "Now if only a hippopotamus could fly up in the air out of that bush, or you preserved flying elephants on the estate, why, then--"

"Why even Jink might hit that sort of bird," cried Sir Howard, hilariously slapping

his host on the back. "Even he might hit a haystack or a hippopotamus."

"Look here, you fellows," said Fisher. "I want you to come along with me for a minute and shoot at something else. Not a hippopotamus. Another kind of queer animal I've found on the estate. It's an animal with three legs and one eye, and it's all the colors of the rainbow."

"What the deuce are you talking about?" asked Burke.

"You come along and see," replied Fisher, cheerfully.

Such people seldom reject anything nonsensical, for they are always seeking for something new. They gravely rearmed themselves from the gun-room and trooped along at the tail of their guide, Sir Howard only pausing, in a sort of ecstasy, to point out the celebrated gilt summerhouse on which the gilt weathercock still stood crooked. It was dusk turning to dark by the time they reached the remote green by the poplars and accepted the new and aimless game of shooting at the old mark.

The last light seemed to fade from the lawn, and the poplars against the sunset were like great plumes upon a purple hearse, when the futile procession finally curved round, and came out in front of the target. Sir Howard again slapped his host on the shoulder, shoving him playfully forward to take the first shot. The shoulder and arm he touched seemed unnaturally stiff and angular. Mr. Jenkins was holding his gun in an attitude more awkward than any that his satiric friends had seen or expected.

At the same instant a horrible scream seemed to come from nowhere. It was so unnatural and so unsuited to the scene that it might have been made by some inhuman thing flying on wings above them or eavesdropping in the dark woods beyond. But Fisher knew that it had started and stopped on the pale lips of Jefferson Jenkins, of Montreal, and no one at that moment catching sight of Jefferson Jenkins's face would have complained that it was commonplace. The next moment a torrent of guttural but good-humored oaths came from Major Burke as he and the two other men saw what was in front of them. The target stood up in the dim grass like a dark goblin grinning at them, and it was literally grinning. It had two eyes like stars, and in similar livid points of light were picked out the two upturned and open nostrils and the two ends of the wide and tight mouth. A few white dots above each eye indicated the hoary eyebrows; and one of them ran upward almost erect. It was a brilliant caricature done in bright dotted lines and March knew of whom. It shone in the shadowy grass, smeared with sea fire as if one of the submarine monsters had crawled into the twilight garden; but it had the head of a dead man.

"It's only luminous paint," said Burke. "Old Fisher's been having a joke with that phosphorescent stuff of his."

"Seems to be meant for old Puggy" observed Sir Howard. "Hits him off very well."

With that they all laughed, except Jenkins. When they had all done, he made a noise like the first effort of an animal to laugh, and Horne Fisher suddenly strode across to him and said:

"Mr. Jenkins, I must speak to you at once in private."

It was by the little watercourse in the moors, on the slope under the hanging rock, that March met his new friend Fisher, by appointment, shortly after the ugly and almost grotesque scene that had broken up the group in the garden.

"It was a monkey-trick of mine," observed Fisher, gloomily, "putting phosphorus on the target; but the only chance to make him jump was to give him the horrors suddenly. And when he saw the face he'd shot at shining on the target he practiced on, all lit up with an infernal light, he did jump. Quite enough for my own intellectual satisfaction."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand even now," said March, "exactly what he did or why he did it."

"You ought to," replied Fisher, with his rather dreary smile, "for you gave me the first suggestion yourself. Oh yes, you did; and it was a very shrewd one. You said a man wouldn't take sandwiches with him to dine at a great house. It was quite true; and the inference was that, though he was going there, he didn't mean to dine there. Or, at any rate, that he might not be dining there. It occurred to me at once that he probably expected the visit to be unpleasant, or the reception doubtful, or something that would prevent his accepting hospitality. Then it struck me that Turnbull was a terror to certain shady characters in the past, and that he had come down to identify and denounce one of them. The chances at the start pointed to the host--that is, Jenkins. I'm morally certain now that Jenkins was the undesirable alien Turnbull wanted to convict in another shooting-affair, but you see the shooting gentleman had another shot in his locker."

"But you said he would have to be a very good shot," protested March.

"Jenkins is a very good shot," said Fisher. "A very good shot who can pretend to be a very bad shot. Shall I tell you the second hint I hit on, after yours, to make me think it was Jenkins? It was my cousin's account of his bad shooting. He'd

shot a cockade off a hat and a weathercock off a building. Now, in fact, a man must shoot very well indeed to shoot so badly as that. He must shoot very neatly to hit the cockade and not the head, or even the hat. If the shots had really gone at random, the chances are a thousand to one that they would not have hit such prominent and picturesque objects. They were chosen because they were prominent and picturesque objects. They make a story to go the round of society. He keeps the crooked weathercock in the summerhouse to perpetuate the story of a legend. And then he lay in wait with his evil eye and wicked gun, safely ambushed behind the legend of his own incompetence.

"But there is more than that. There is the summerhouse itself. I mean there is the whole thing. There's all that Jenkins gets chaffed about, the gilding and the gaudy colors and all the vulgarity that's supposed to stamp him as an upstart. Now, as a matter of fact, upstarts generally don't do this. God knows there's enough of 'em in society; and one knows 'em well enough. And this is the very last thing they do. They're generally only too keen to know the right thing and do it; and they instantly put themselves body and soul into the hands of art decorators and art experts, who do the whole thing for them. There's hardly another millionaire alive who has the moral courage to have a gilt monogram on a chair like that one in the gun-room. For that matter, there's the name as well as the monogram. Names like Tompkins and Jenkins and Jinks are funny without being vulgar; I mean they are vulgar without being common. If you prefer it, they are commonplace without being common. They are just the names to be chosen to look ordinary, but they're really rather extraordinary. Do you know many people called Tompkins? It's a good deal rarer than Talbot. It's pretty much the same with the comic clothes of the parvenu. Jenkins dresses like a character in Punch. But that's because he is a character in Punch. I mean he's a fictitious character. He's a fabulous animal. He doesn't exist.

"Have you ever considered what it must be like to be a man who doesn't exist? I mean to be a man with a fictitious character that he has to keep up at the expense not merely of personal talents: To be a new kind of hypocrite hiding a talent in a new kind of napkin. This man has chosen his hypocrisy very ingeniously; it was really a new one. A subtle villain has dressed up as a dashing gentleman and a worthy business man and a philanthropist and a saint; but the loud checks of a comical little cad were really rather a new disguise. But the disguise must be very irksome to a man who can really do things. This is a dexterous little cosmopolitan guttersnipe who can do scores of things, not only shoot, but draw and paint, and probably play the fiddle. Now a man like that may find the hiding of his talents useful; but he could never help wanting to use them where they were useless. If he can draw, he will draw absent-mindedly on blotting paper. I suspect this rascal has often drawn poor old Puggy's face on blotting paper. Probably he began doing it in blots as he afterward did it in dots, or rather

shots. It was the same sort of thing; he found a disused target in a deserted yard and couldn't resist indulging in a little secret shooting, like secret drinking. You thought the shots all scattered and irregular, and so they were; but not accidental. No two distances were alike; but the different points were exactly where he wanted to put them. There's nothing needs such mathematical precision as a wild caricature. I've dabbled a little in drawing myself, and I assure you that to put one dot where you want it is a marvel with a pen close to a piece of paper. It was a miracle to do it across a garden with a gun. But a man who can work those miracles will always itch to work them, if it's only in the dark."

After a pause March observed, thoughtfully, "But he couldn't have brought him down like a bird with one of those little guns."

"No; that was why I went into the gun-room," replied Fisher. "He did it with one of Burke's rifles, and Burke thought he knew the sound of it. That's why he rushed out without a hat, looking so wild. He saw nothing but a car passing quickly, which he followed for a little way, and then concluded he'd made a mistake."

There was another silence, during which Fisher sat on a great stone as motionless as on their first meeting, and watched the gray and silver river eddying past under the bushes. Then March said, abruptly, "Of course he knows the truth now."

"Nobody knows the truth but you and I," answered Fisher, with a certain softening in his voice. "And I don't think you and I will ever quarrel."

"What do you mean?" asked March, in an altered accent. "What have you done about it?"

Horne Fisher continued to gaze steadily at the eddying stream. At last he said, "The police have proved it was a motor accident."

"But you know it was not."

"I told you that I know too much," replied Fisher, with his eye on the river. "I know that, and I know a great many other things. I know the atmosphere and the way the whole thing works. I know this fellow has succeeded in making himself something incurably commonplace and comic. I know you can't get up a persecution of old Toole or Little Tich. If I were to tell Hoggs or Halkett that old Jink was an assassin, they would almost die of laughter before my eyes. Oh, I don't say their laughter's quite innocent, though it's genuine in its way. They want old Jink, and they couldn't do without him. I don't say I'm quite innocent. I

like Hoggs; I don't want him to be down and out; and he'd be done for if Jink can't pay for his coronet. They were devilish near the line at the last election. But the only real objection to it is that it's impossible. Nobody would believe it; it's not in the picture. The crooked weathercock would always turn it into a joke."

"Don't you think this is infamous?" asked March, quietly.

"I think a good many things," replied the other. "If you people ever happen to blow the whole tangle of society to hell with dynamite, I don't know that the human race will be much the worse. But don't be too hard on me merely because I know what society is. That's why I moon away my time over things like stinking fish."

There was a pause as he settled himself down again by the stream; and then he added:

"I told you before I had to throw back the big fish."