

## With the Photographer

by Stephen Leacock

### About the Author

Stephen Leacock (1869–1944) was a Canadian humourist, economist, and author. Known for his wit and satire, Leacock wrote extensively on social and political issues, often using humour to critique human behaviour and societal norms. His works, such as *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* and *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, remain classics of Canadian literature. *With the Photographer* is a humorous short story that showcases Leacock's ability to find comedy in everyday situations.

### Background of the Story

*With the Photographer* is a satirical piece that humorously critiques the pretentiousness and rigidity of professional photographers. Written in the early 20th century, the story reflects the formal and often exaggerated practices of photography studios during that era. Leacock uses his personal experience to highlight the absurdity of trying to achieve "perfection" in a photograph, often at the expense of individuality and naturalness.

### Message of the Story

The story conveys the message that obsession with perfection and artificiality can strip away authenticity and individuality. It humorously critiques the photographer's attempt to "improve" the narrator's appearance, emphasizing the importance of accepting oneself as one is. Leacock also highlights the absurdity of rigid professionalism that disregards personal preferences and emotions.

### Themes

**Satire on Professionalism:** The story humorously critiques the overly serious and rigid attitude of professionals who prioritize their methods over the client's comfort.

**Authenticity vs. Artificiality:** It explores the conflict between natural appearance and the artificial "perfection" imposed by the photographer.

**Human Vanity:** The story subtly mocks human vanity and the desire to appear flawless in photographs.

**Humour in Everyday Life:** Leacock finds comedy in a mundane situation, showcasing his ability to turn ordinary experiences into entertaining narratives.

### Summary

1. The narrator visits a photography studio to have his portrait taken. He is made to wait for an hour before the photographer, a serious and unsmiling man, calls him into the studio.

2. The photographer examines the narrator's face with a critical eye, finding fault with his features. He declares the face "quite wrong" and suggests that it would look better from a three-quarters angle. The narrator feels uncomfortable but tries to remain polite.

3. The photographer positions the narrator in various awkward poses, adjusting his face, ears, and expressions. The narrator feels humiliated as the photographer orders him to close his mouth, droop his ears, and expand his lungs. The process becomes increasingly frustrating for the narrator.

4. Just as the narrator grows angry and is about to leave, the photographer secretly takes a snapshot, capturing the narrator's animated expression. The photographer seems pleased with the result and asks the narrator to return on Saturday to see the proof.

5. When the narrator returns, he is shocked to see the edited photograph. The photographer has altered his eyebrows, mouth, and other features, and even suggests removing his ears entirely. The narrator, who wanted a natural portrait for his family to remember him by, is deeply offended.

6. Frustrated and humiliated, the narrator declares the edited photograph worthless and leaves the studio in tears. The story ends with the narrator feeling disheartened by the experience.

### Important Phrases

**"The face is quite wrong":** The photographer's blunt criticism of the narrator's face. Highlights the absurdity of the photographer's obsession with perfection.

**"Close your mouth, droop your ears, and expand your lungs":** The photographer's instructions to the narrator. Reflects the ridiculousness of the posing process and adds humour to the story.

**"I wanted a picture of myself as I am":** The narrator's desire for a natural portrait. Emphasizes the theme of authenticity vs. artificiality.

**"I left the studio in tears":** The narrator's reaction to the edited photograph. Highlights the emotional impact of the photographer's insensitivity.

### Poetic Devices

**Satire:** The story uses satire to mock the pretentiousness of professional photographers. The photographer's exaggerated criticism of the narrator's face.

**Irony:** The narrator visits the studio for a simple portrait but ends up feeling humiliated.

**Example:** The photographer's attempt to "improve" the narrator's appearance results in dissatisfaction.

**Hyperbole:** The photographer's suggestion to remove the narrator's ears is an exaggerated and absurd idea.

**Imagery:** Vivid descriptions of the photographer's studio and the posing process. **Example:** "The photographer came closer, tenderly holding my face, and then roughly turned it."

**Tone:** The tone is humorous and satirical, reflecting Leacock's style.

With the Photographer is a delightful story that uses humour and satire to explore themes of authenticity, vanity, and professionalism.