

# Free!

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## Photograph [girl]

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### Parable #3

One day, a small town man was struck by a quite novel idea. It occurred to him why spouses, after they had been together for some time, looked so much alike in certain respects. The reason, he decided was their subconscious imitation of each other's facial expression. As they talked and watched one another, they adopted certain ways of holding their mouths, their eyebrows; special ways of glancing and nodding at things; identifiable looks of contemplation and confusion, petty or concerned. And these ways were the ways of their companion in life.

The man's new interest in life knew no bounds. He scrutinized nearly everyone he met; only the blatant imitation to be seen in the faces of children did not intrigue him. He learned and memorized the subtle forms that spousal imitation took on in his town. He couldn't remember just exactly when it first happened, but there came a time when his sense for these reflected facial expressions opened a new and even subtler world for him. Spousal imitation was not all there was to the world. A man with a good eye for this sort of thing could discern similarities which were the result of only a few months, weeks, even a few days of acquaintance. And he had just the eye. He could tell who a person was having an affair with by certain facial similarities which begin to show after, say, about a month. The darker side of his town's social life was laid bare before his very eyes. Soon the man became interested in the most transitory effects. He gave parties. His introductions were conscious creative efforts. For instance, he would bring a lady who constantly and delicately arched her eyebrows over to meet a man with a tendency to flare his nostrils and observe the results of their five-minute *tete-à-tete*. Of course, if two people hated one another, they would consciously avoid imitation. But even this effect interested him. For at such moments a person revealed what he thought was his most individualistic stance, his most intense denial of habitual imitation. The host enjoyed noticing influences of other people in these "individualistic" stances. When the party was over, he would help his guests into their cars so he could ever so briefly watch their faces sink back into time-honored reflection of each other.

The small town man—after a year or so of partying—became a cynic. His introductions acquired tonations of cruelty. People grew more and more annoyed by his piercing and disdainful stares; they stopped coming to his parties altogether. Everyone adopted an "individualistic" stance when in his presence. The exciting part of his new life came to an abrupt end. What had once seemed the variety of life, became a burden to him; and he wasn't at all reassured by the notion that, in death, all people look alike.

He couldn't bear to look at himself in a mirror.