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***FAMILIAR INCIDENTS***

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## I.—With the Photographer

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“I WANT my photograph taken,” I said. The photographer looked at me without enthusiasm. He was a drooping man in a grey suit, with the dim eye of a natural scientist. But there is no need to describe him. Everybody knows what a photographer is like.

“Sit there,” he said, “and wait.”

I waited an hour. I read the *Ladies' Companion* for 1912, the *Girls' Magazine* for 1902, and the *Infants' Journal* for 1888. I began to see that I had done an unwarrantable thing in breaking in on the privacy of this man's scientific pursuits with a face like mine.

After an hour the photographer opened the inner door.

“Come in,” he said severely.

I went into the studio.

“Sit down,” said the photographer.

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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I sat down in a beam of sunlight filtered through a sheet of factory cotton hung against a frosted skylight.

The photographer rolled a machine into the middle of the room and crawled into it from behind.

He was only in a second—just time enough for one look at me—and then he was out again, tearing at the cotton sheet and the window panes with a hooked stick, apparently frantic for light and air.

Then he crawled back into the machine again and drew a little black cloth over himself. This time he was very quiet in there. I knew that he was praying and I kept still.

When the photographer came out at last, he looked very grave and shook his head.

“The face is quite wrong,” he said.

“I know,” I answered quietly, “I have always known it.”

He sighed.

“I think,” he said, “the face would be better three-quarters full.”

“I’m sure it would,” I said enthusiastically,

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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for I was glad to find that the man had such a human side to him. "So would yours. In fact," I continued, "how many faces one sees that are apparently hard, narrow, limited, but the minute you get them three-quarters full they get wide, large, almost boundless in——"

But the photographer had ceased to listen. He came over and took my head in his hands and twisted it sideways. I thought he meant to kiss me, and I closed my eyes.

But I was wrong.

He twisted my face as far as it would go and then stood looking at it.

He sighed again.

"I don't like the head," he said.

Then he went back to the machine and took another look.

"Open the mouth a little," he said.

I started to do so.

"Close it," he added quickly.

Then he looked again.

"The ears are *bad*," he said, "droop them a little more. Thank you. Now the eyes. Roll them in under the lids. Put the hands

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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on the knees, please, and turn the face just a little upwards. Yes, that's better. Now just expand the lungs! So! And hump the neck—that's it—and just contract the waist—ha! and twist the hip up towards the elbow—now! I still don't quite like the face, it's just a trifle *too* full, but——”

I swung myself round on the stool.

“Stop,” I said with emotion but, I think, with dignity. “This face is *my* face. It is not yours; it is mine. I've lived with it for forty years and I know its faults. I know it's out of drawing; I know it wasn't made for me; but it's *my* face—the only one I have”—I was conscious of a break in my voice, but I went on—“such as it is, I've learned to love it. And this is my mouth, not yours. These ears are *mine*, and if your machine is too narrow——” Here I started to rise from the seat.

Snick!

The photographer had pulled the string. The photograph was taken. I could see the machine still staggering from the shock.

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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“I think,” said the photographer, pursing his lips in a pleased smile, “that I caught the features just in a moment of animation.”

“So!” I said biting, “features, eh? You didn’t think I could animate them, I suppose? But let me see the picture.”

“Oh, there’s nothing to see yet,” he said, “I have to develop the negative first. Come back on Saturday and I’ll let you see a proof of it.”

On Saturday I went back.

The photographer beckoned me in. I thought he seemed quieter and graver than before. I think, too, there was a certain pride in his manner.

He unfolded the proof of a large photograph and we both looked at it in silence.

“Is it me?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “it is you,” and he went on looking at it.

“The eyes,” I said hesitatingly, “don’t look very much like mine.”

“Oh, no,” he answered, “I’ve retouched them; they come out splendidly don’t they?”

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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"Fine," I said; "but surely my eyebrows are not like that?"

"No," said the photographer, with a momentary glance at my face, "the eyebrows are removed. We have a process, now—the Delphide—for putting in new ones. You'll notice here where we've applied it to carry the hair away from the brow. I don't like the hair low on the skull."

"Oh, you don't, don't you?" I said.

"No," he went on, "I don't care for it. I like to get the hair clear back to the superficies and make out a new brow line."

"What about the mouth," I said, with a bitterness that was lost on the photographer, "is that mine?"

"It's adjusted a little," he said; "yours is too low. I found I couldn't use it."

"The ears, though," I said, "strike me as a good likeness:—they're just like mine."

"Yes," said the photographer thoughtfully, "that's so; but I can fix that all right in the print. We have a process now—the Sulphide



"IS IT ME?"



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### *Familiar Incidents*

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—for removing the ears entirely. I'll see if——”

“Listen,” I interrupted, drawing myself up and animating my features to their full extent and speaking with a withering scorn that should have blasted the man on the spot. “I came here for a photograph, a picture, something which—mad though it seems—would have looked like me. I wanted something that would depict my face as Heaven gave it to me, humble though the gift may have been. I wanted something that my friends might keep after my death, to reconcile them to my loss. It seems that I was mistaken. What I wanted is no longer done. Go on, then, with your brutal work. Take your negative, or whatever it is you call it, dip it in sulphide, bromide, oxide, cow-hide—anything you like; remove the eyes, correct the mouth, adjust the face, restore the lips, reanimate the necktie and reconstruct the waistcoat. Coat it with an inch of gloss, shade it, emboss it, gild it, till even you acknowledge that it is finished. Then whe-

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### *Familiar Incidents*

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you have done all that, keep it for yourself and your friends. They may value it. To me it is but a worthless bauble."

I broke into tears and left.



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## II.—*The Dentist and the Gas*

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“**I** THINK,” said the dentist, stepping outside again, “I’d better give you gas.”

Then he moved aside and hummed an air from a light opera, while he mixed up cement  
I sat up in my shroud.

“Gas!” I said.

“Yes,” he repeated, “gas or else ether or a sulphuric anæsthetic or else beat you into insensibility with a club or give you three thousand volts of electricity.”

These may not have been his exact words. But they convey the feeling of them very nicely.

I could see the light of primitive criminality shining behind the man’s spectacles.

And to think that this was *my* fault—the result of my own reckless neglect. I had grown so used to sitting back dozing in my

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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shroud in the dentist's chair, listening to the twittering of the birds outside, my eyes closed in the sweet half sleep of perfect security, that the old apprehensiveness and mental agony had practically all gone.

He didn't hurt me, and I knew it.

I had grown—I know it sounds mad—almost to like him.

For a time I had kept up the appearance of being hurt every few minutes, just as a precaution. Then even that had ceased, and I had dropped into vainglorious apathy.

It was this, of course, which had infuriated the dentist. He meant to reassert his power. He knew that nothing but gas could rouse me out of my lethargy and he meant to apply it—either gas or some other powerful pain stimulant.

So as soon as he said *g.*, my senses were alert in a moment.

“When are you going to do it?” I said in horror.

“Right now, if you like,” he answered.

His eyes were glittering with what the

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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Germans call Blutlust. All dentists have it.

I could see that if I took my eye off him for a moment he might spring at me, gas in hand, and throttle me.

"No, not now, I can't stay now," I said, "I have an appointment, a whole lot of appointments, urgent ones, the most urgent I ever had." I was unfastening my shroud as I spoke.

"Well then, to-morrow" said the dentist.

"No," I said, "to-morrow is Saturday. And Saturday is a day when I simply can't take gas. If I take gas, even the least bit of gas, on a Saturday, I find it's misunderstood."

"Monday, then."

"Monday, I'm afraid, won't do. It's a bad day for me, worse than I can explain."

"Tuesday?" said the dentist.

"Not Tuesday," I answered, "Tuesday is the worst day of all. On Tuesday my church society meets, and I *must* go to it."

I hadn't been near it in reality for three

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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years, but suddenly I felt a longing to attend it.

“On Wednesday,” I went on, speaking hurriedly and wildly, “I have another appointment, a swimming club, and on Thursday two appointments, a choral society and a funeral. On Friday I have another funeral. Saturday is market day. Sunday is washing day. Monday is drying day —”

“Hold on,” said the dentist, speaking very firmly. “You come to-morrow morning, I’ll write the engagement for ten o’clock.”

I think it must have been hypnotism.

Before I knew it, I had said “Yes.”

I went out.

In the street I met a man I knew.

“Have you ever taken gas from a dentist?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” he said. “It’s nothing.”

Soon after I met another man.

“Have you ever taken gas?” I asked.

“Oh, certainly,” he answered, “it’s nothing, nothing at all.”

Altogether I asked about fifty people that

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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day about gas and they all said that it was absolutely nothing. When I said that I was to take it to-morrow, they showed no concern whatever. I looked in their faces for traces of anxiety. There weren't any. They all said that it wouldn't hurt me, that it was nothing.

So then I was glad because I knew that gas was nothing.

It began to seem hardly worth while to keep the appointment. Why go all the way down town for such a mere nothing?

But I did go.

I kept the appointment.

What followed was such an absolute nothing that I shouldn't bother to relate it except for the sake of my friends.

The dentist was there with two assistants. All three had white coats on, as rigid as naval uniforms.

I forget whether they carried revolvers.

Nothing could exceed their quiet courage. Let me pay them that tribute.

I was laid out in my shroud in a long chair

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### *Familiar Incidents*

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and tied down to it—I think I was tied down; perhaps I was fastened with nails—this part of it was a mere nothing. It simply felt like being tied down by three strong men armed with pinchers.

After that a gas tank and a pump were placed beside me and a set of rubber tubes fastened tight over my mouth and nose. Even those who have never taken gas can realise how ridiculously simple is this.

Then they began pumping in gas. The sensation of this part of it I cannot, unfortunately, recall. It happened that just as they began to administer the gas, I fell asleep. I don't quite know why. Perhaps I was overtired. Perhaps it was the simple home charm of the surroundings, the soft drowsy hum of the gas pump, the twittering of the dentists in the trees—did I say in the trees?—No, of course they weren't in the trees—imagine dentists in the trees—ha! ha!—here, take off this gas pipe from my face till I laugh—really I just want to laugh—only to laugh——

Well, that's what it felt like.





I DID GO—I KEPT THE APPOINTMENT

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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Meanwhile, they were operating.

Of course I didn't *feel* it. All I felt was that someone dealt me a powerful blow in the face with a sledge-hammer. After that somebody took a pick-axe and cracked in my jaw with it. That was all.

It was a mere nothing. I felt at the time that a man who objects to a few taps on the face with a pick-axe is over critical.

I didn't happen to wake up till they had practically finished. So I really missed the whole thing.

The assistants had gone and the dentist was mixing up cement and humming airs from light opera just like old times. It made the world seem a bright place.

I went home with no teeth. I only meant them to remove one, but I realised that they had taken them all out. Still, it didn't matter.

Not long after I received my bill. I was astounded at the nerve of it ; for administering gas, debtor, so much ; for removing teeth, debtor, so much—and so on.

In return I sent in my bill :—

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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DR. WILLIAM JAWS

Debtor :

To mental agony . . . .	\$ 50.00
To gross lies in regard to the nothingness of gas . . . .	100.00
To putting me under gas . . . .	50.00
To having fun with me under gas . . . .	100.00
To Brilliant Ideas, occurred to me under gas and lost . . . .	<u>100.00</u>
Grand Total . . . .	\$400.00

My bill has been contested and is in the hands of a solicitor. The matter will prove, I understand, a test case, and will go to the final courts. If the judges have toothache during the trial, I shall win.

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### *III.—My Lost Opportunities*

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**T**HE other day I took a walk with a real estate man, out in the suburbs. He leaned over the wooden fence of an empty lot and waved his hand at it.

“There’s a lot,” he said, “that we sold last week for half a million dollars.”

“Did you really?” I exclaimed.

“Yes,” he said, “and do you know that twenty-five years ago you could have picked that up for fifty thousand!”

“What,” I said, “do you mean to say that I could have had all that beautiful grass and those mullein stalks for fifty thousand dollars?”

“I do.”

“You mean that when I was a student at college, feeding on four dollars a week, this opportunity was knocking at the door and I missed it?”

I turned my head away in bitterness as I

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### *Familiar Incidents*

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thought of my own folly. Why had I never happened to walk out this way with fifty thousand dollars in my pocket and buy all this beautiful mud?

The real estate man smiled complacently at my grief.

"I can show you more than that," he said. "Do you see that big stretch of empty ground out there past that last fence?"

"Yes, yes," I said excitedly, "the land with the beautiful tar-paper shack and the withered cedar tree, the one withered cedar tree standing in its lonely isolation and seeming to beckon——"

"Say," he said, "was you ever in the real estate business yourself?"

"No," I answered, "but I have a poetic mind, and I begin to see the poetry, the majesty, of real estate."

"Oh, is that it?" he answered. "Well, that land out there—it's an acre and a half—was sold yesterday for three million dollars!!"

"For what?"

"For three million dollars, cold."

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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“Not cold!” I said, “don’t tell me it was cold.”

“Yes,” went on the real estate man, “and only three years ago you could have come out here and had it for a song!”

“For a song!” I repeated.

Just think of it! And I had missed it! With a voice like mine. If I had known what I know now, I would have come out to that land and sung to it all night. I never knew in the days when I was content with fifteen dollars a week what a hidden gift my voice was. I should have taken up land singing and made a fortune out of it.

The thought of it saddened me all the way home; and the talk of the real estate man as he went made me feel still worse.

He showed me a church that I could have bought for a hundred thousand and sold now at half a million for a motor garage. If I had started buying churches instead of working on a newspaper, I’d have been rich to-day.

There was a skating-rink I could have bought, and a theatre and a fruit store, a

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## *Familiar Incidents*

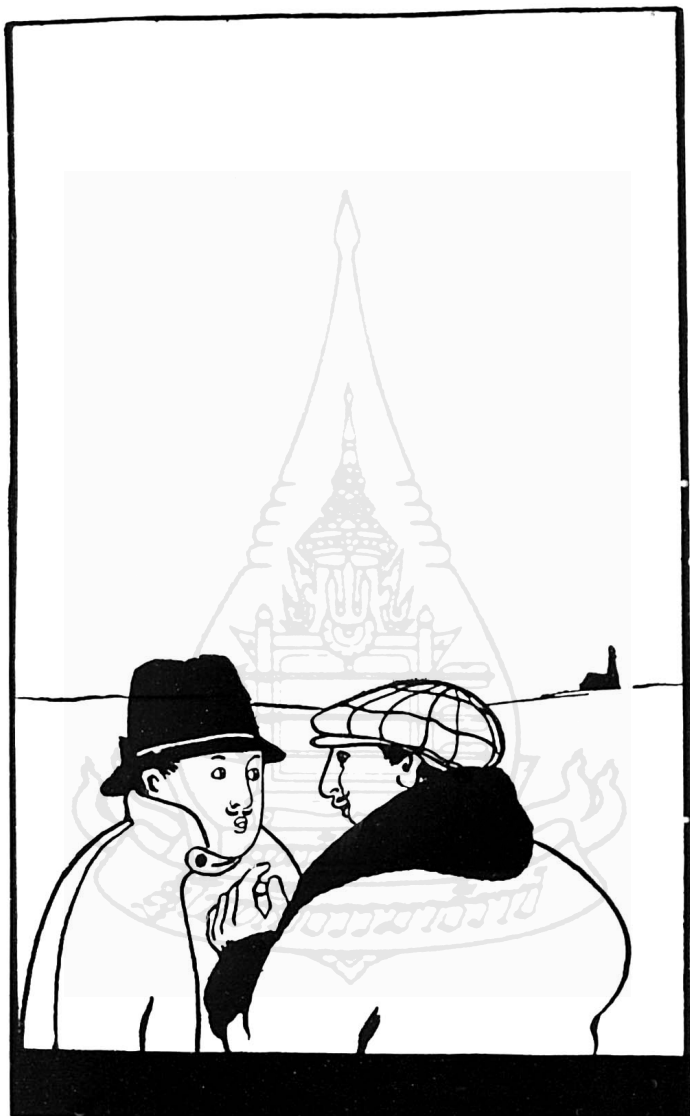
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beautiful little one-story wooden fruit store, right on a corner, with the darlinest Italian in it that you ever saw. There was the cutest little pet of a cow-stable that I could have turned into an apartment store at a profit of a million, at the time when I was studying Greek and forgetting it. Oh! the wasted opportunities of life!

And that evening, when I got back to the club and talked about it at dinner to my business friends, I found that I had only heard a small part of it.

Real estate! That's nothing! Why they told me that fifteen years ago I could have had all sorts of things—trunk line railways, sugar refineries, silver mines, any of them for a song. When I heard it I was half glad I hadn't sung for the land. They told me that there was a time when I could have bought out the Federal Steel Co. for twenty million dollars! And I let it go.

The whole Canadian Pacific Railway, they said, was thrown on the market for fifty millions. I left it there writhing, and didn't



HE SHOWED ME A CHURCH THAT I COULD HAVE BOUGHT FOR A HUNDRED THOUSAND



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## *Familiar Incidents*

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pick it up. Sheer lack of confidence! I see now why these men get rich. It's their fine glorious confidence, that enables them to write out a cheque for fifty million dollars and think nothing of it.

If I wrote a cheque like that, I'd be afraid of going to Sing Sing. But they aren't, and so they get what they deserve.

Forty-five years ago—a man at the club told me this with almost a sob in his voice—either Rockefeller or Carnegie could have been bought clean up for a thousand dollars!

Think of it!

Why didn't my father buy them for me, as pets, for my birthday and let me keep them till I grew up?

If I had my life over again, no school or education for me! Not with all this beautiful mud and these tar-paper shacks and corner lot fruit stores lying round! I'd buy out the whole United States and take a chance, a sporting chance, on the rise in values.

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#### IV.—*My Unknown Friend*

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**H**E stepped into the smoking compartment of the Pullman where I was sitting alone.

He had on a long fur-lined coat and he carried a fifty dollar suit-case that he put down on the seat.

Then he saw me.

“Well, well!!” he said, and recognition broke out all over his face like morning sunlight.

“Well, well,” I repeated.

“By Jove!” he said, shaking hands vigorously, “who would have thought of seeing you?”

Who indeed, I thought to myself.

He looked at me more closely.

“You haven’t changed a bit,” he said.

“Neither have you,” said I heartily.

“You may be a *little* stouter,” he went on critically.

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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“Yes,” I said, “a little, but you’re stouter yourself.”

This, of course, would help to explain away any undue stoutness on my part.

“No,” I continued, boldly and firmly, “you look just about the same as ever.”

And all the time I was wondering who he was. I didn’t know him from Adam: I couldn’t recall him a bit. I don’t mean that my memory is weak. On the contrary, it is singularly tenacious. True, I find it very hard to remember people’s *names*; very often too it is hard for me to recall a *face*; and frequently I fail to recall a person’s appearance; and of course clothes are a thing one doesn’t notice. But apart from these details, I never forget anybody and I am proud of it. But when it does happen that a name or face escapes me, I never lose my presence of mind. I know just how to deal with the situation. It only needs coolness and intellect and it all comes right.

My friend sat down.

“It’s a long time since we met,” he said.

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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"A long time," I repeated with something of a note of sadness. I wanted him to feel that I too had suffered from it.

"But it has gone very quickly."

"Like a flash," I assented cheerfully.

"Strange," he said, "how life goes on and we lose track of people, and things alter. I often think about it. I sometimes wonder," he continued, "where all the old gang are gone to."

"So do I," I said.

In fact I was wondering about it at the very moment. I always find in circumstances like these that a man begins sooner or later to talk of the 'old gang' or 'the boys' or 'the crowd.' That's where the opportunity comes in to gather who he is.

"Do you ever go back to the old place?" he asked.

"Never," I said, firmly and flatly. This had to be absolute. I felt that once and for all the 'old place' must be ruled out of the discussion till I could discover where it was.

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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“No,” he went on, “I suppose you’d hardly care to.”

“Not now,” I said very gently.

“I understand. I beg your pardon,” he said, and there was silence for a few moments.

So far I had scored the first point. There was evidently an old place somewhere to which I would hardly care to go.

That was something to build on.

. . . . .

Presently he began again.

“Yes,” he said, “I sometimes meet some of the old boys and they begin to talk of you and wonder what you’re doing.”

“Poor things,” I thought, but I didn’t say it.

I knew it was time now to make a bold stroke; so I used the method that I always employ. I struck in with great animation.

“Say!” I said, “where’s Billy? Do you ever hear anything of Billy now?”

This is really a very safe line. Every old gang has a Billy in it.

“Yes,” said my friend, “sure—Billy is

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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ranching out in Montana. I saw him in Chicago last spring—weighed about two hundred pounds—you wouldn't know him."

No, I certainly wouldn't, I murmured to myself.

"And where's Pete?" I said. This was safe ground. There is always a Pete.

"You mean Billy's brother," he said.

"Yes, yes, Billy's brother Pete. I often think of him."

"Oh," answered the unknown man, "old Pete's quite changed—settled down altogether"—here he began to chuckle—"why Pete's married!"

I started to laugh too. Under these circumstances it is always supposed to be very funny if a man has got married. The notion of old Peter (whoever he is) being married is presumed to be simply killing. I kept on chuckling away quietly at the mere idea of it. I was hoping that I might manage to keep on laughing till the train stopped. I had only fifty miles more to go. It's not hard to laugh for fifty miles if you know how.

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*Familiar Incidents*

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But my friend wouldn't be content with it.

. . . . .

"I often meant to write to you," he said, his voice falling to a confidential tone, "especially when I heard of your loss."

I remained quiet. What had I lost? Was it money? And if so, how much? And why had I lost it? I wondered if it had ruined me or only partly ruined me.

"One can never get over a loss like that," he continued solemnly.

Evidently I was plumb ruined. But I said nothing and remained under cover waiting to draw his fire.

"Yes," the man went on, "death is always sad."

Death! Oh, that was it, was it? I almost hiccoughed with joy. That was easy. Handling a case of death in these conversations is simplicity itself. One has only to sit quiet and wait to find out who is dead.

"Yes," I murmured, "very sad. But it has its other side too."

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*Familiar Incidents*

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“Very true, especially, of course, at that age.”

“As you say, at that age, and after such a life.”

“Strong and bright to the last, I suppose,” he continued, very sympathetically.

“Yes,” I said, falling on sure ground, “able to sit up in bed and smoke within a few days of the end.”

“What,” he said, perplexed, “did your grandmother——”

My grandmother! That was it, was it?

“Pardon me,” I said, provoked at my own stupidity—“when I say smoked, I mean able to sit up and be smoked to—a habit she had—being read to, and being smoked to—only thing that seemed to compose her——”

As I said this I could hear the rattle and clatter of the train running past the semaphores and switch points and slackening to a stop.

My friend looked quickly out of the window.

His face was agitated.



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### *Familiar Incidents*

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“Great heavens!” he said, “that’s the junction. I’ve missed my stop. I should have got out at the last station. Say, porteur,” he called out into the alley way, “how long do we stop here?”

“Just two minutes, sab” called a voice back. “She’s late now, she’s makin’ up tahn!”

My friend had hopped up now and had pulled out a bunch of keys and was fumbling at the lock of the suit-case.

“I’ll have to wire back or something,” he gasped; “confound this lock—my money’s in the suit-case.”

My one fear now was that he would fail to get off.

“Here,” I said, pulling some money out of my pocket, “don’t bother with the lock. Here’s money.”

“Thanks,” he said, grabbing the roll of money out of my hand—in his excitement he took all that I had—“I’ll just have time.”

He sprang from the train. I saw him through the window, moving towards the

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*Familiar Incidents*

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waiting room. He didn't seem going very fast.

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I waited.

The porters were calling, "All abawd ! All abawd !" There was the clang of a bell, a hiss of steam, and in a second the train was off.

Idiot, I thought, he's missed it ; and there was his fifty dollar suit-case lying on the seat.

I waited, looking out of the window and wondering who the man was anyway.

Then presently I heard the porter's voice again. He evidently was guiding someone through the car.

"Ah looked all through the kyar for it, sah," he was saying.

"I left it in the seat in the car there behind my wife," said the angry voice of a stranger, a well-dressed man who put his head into the door of the compartment. Then his face too beamed all at once with recognition. But it was not for me. It was for the fifty dollar valise.



I SHALL NOT TRY TO BE QUITE SO EXTRAORDINARILY CLEVER

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## *Familiar Incidents*

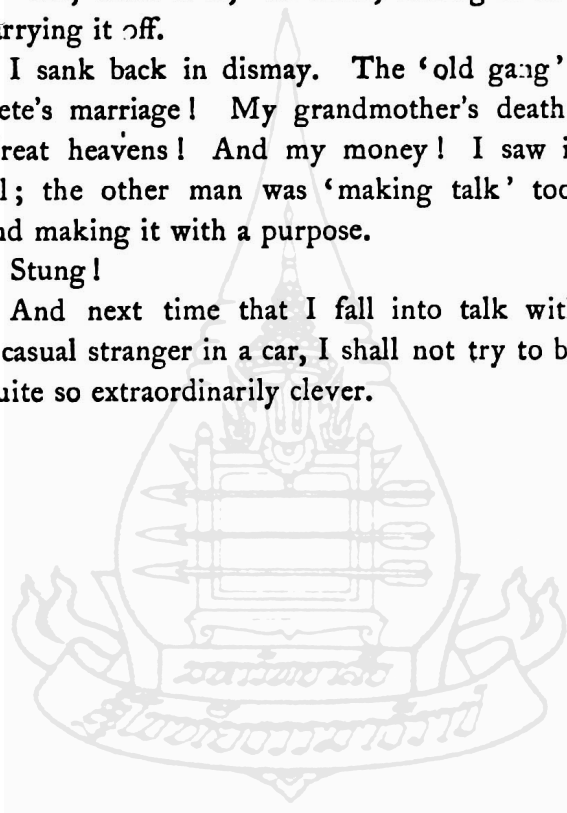
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“Ah, there it is,” he cried, seizing it and carrying it off.

I sank back in dismay. The ‘old gang’! Pete’s marriage! My grandmother’s death! Great heavens! And my money! I saw it all; the other man was ‘making talk’ too, and making it with a purpose.

Stung!

And next time that I fall into talk with a casual stranger in a car, I shall not try to be quite so extraordinarily clever.



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*V.—Under the Barber's Knife*

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“**W**AS you to the Arena the other night?” said the barber, leaning over me and speaking in his confidential whisper.

“Yes,” I said, “I was there.”

He saw from this that I could still speak. So he laid another thick wet towel over my face before he spoke again.

“What did you think of the game?” he asked.

But he had miscalculated. I could still make a faint sound through the wet towels. He laid three or four more very thick ones over my face and stood with his five finger tips pressed against my face for support. A thick steam rose about me. Through it I could hear the barber's voice and the flick-flack of the razor as he stropped it.

“Yes, sir,” he went on in his quiet pro-

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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fessional tone, punctuated with the noise of the razor, "I knowed from the start them boys was sure to win"—flick-flack-flick-flack—"as soon as I seen the ice that night and seen the get away them boys made I knowed it"—flick-flack—"and just as soon as Jimmy got ahold of the puck——"

This was more than the barber at the next chair could stand.

"Him get de puck!" he cried, giving an angry dash with a full brush of soap into the face of the man under him, "him get ut—dat stiff—why, boys," he said, and he turned appealingly to the eight barbers who all rested their elbows on the customers' faces while they listened to the rising altercation; even the manicurè girl thrilled to attention, clasped tight the lumpy hand of her client in her white digits and remained motionless—"why, boys, dat feller can't no more play hockey than——"

"See here," said my barber suddenly and angrily, striking his fist emphatically on the towels that covered my face, "I'll bet you five

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### *Familiar Incidents*

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dollars to one Jimmy can skate rings round any two men in the league."

"Him skate," sneered the other, squirting a jet of blinding steam in the face of the client he was treating, "he ain't got no more go in him than dat rag," and he slapped a wet towel across his client's face.

All the barbers were excited now. There was a babel of talk from behind each of the eight chairs. "He can't skate!" "He can skate!" "I'll bet you ten."

Already they were losing their tempers, slapping their customers with wet towels and jabbing great brushfuls of soap into their mouths. My barber was leaning over my face with his whole body. In another minute one or the other of them would have been sufficiently provoked to have dealt his customer a blow behind the ear.

Then suddenly there was a hush.

"The boss!" said one.

In another minute I could realise, though I couldn't see it, that a majestic figure in a white coat was moving down the line. All was still

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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again except the quiet hum of the mechanical shampoo brush and the soft burble of running water.

The barber began removing the wet towels from my face one by one. He peeled them off with the professional neatness of an Egyptologist unwrapping a mummy. When he reached my face he looked searchingly at it. There was suspicion in his eye.

“Been out of town?” he questioned.

“Yes,” I admitted.

“Who’s been doing your work?” he asked. This question, from a barber, has no reference to one’s daily occupation. It means “Who has been shaving you?”

I knew it was best to own up. I’d been in the wrong and I meant to acknowledge it with perfect frankness.

“I’ve been shaving myself,” I said.

My barber stood back from me in contempt. There was a distinct sensation all down the line of barbers. One of them threw a wet rag in a corner with a thud, and another sent a sudden squirt from an



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## *Familiar Incidents*

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atomiser into his customer's eyes as a mark of disgust.

My barber continued to look at me narrowly.

"What razor do you use?" he said.

"A safety razor," I answered.

The barber had begun to dash soap over my face, but he stopped, aghast at what I had said.

A safety razor to a barber is like a red rag to a bull.

"If it was me," he went on, beating lather into me as he spoke, "I wouldn't let one of them things near my face! No, sir! There ain't no safety in them. They tear the hide clean off you; just rake the hair right out by the follicles"—as he said this he was illustrating his meaning with jabs of his razor—"them things just cut a man's face all to pieces"—he jabbed a stick of alum against an open cut that he had made—"and as for cleanliness, for sanitation; for this here hygiene, and for germs, I wouldn't have 'em round for a fortune."

I said nothing. I knew I had deserved it and I kept quiet.



WHEN HE REACHED MY FACE HE LOOKED SEARCHINGLY AT IT

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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The barber gradually subsided. Under other circumstances he would have told me something of the spring training of the baseball clubs, or the last items from Jacksonville track, or any of those things which a cultivated man loves to hear discussed between breakfast and business. But I was not worth it. As he neared the end of the shaving he spoke again, this time in a confidential, almost yearning, tone.

“Massage?” he said.

“No, thank you.”

“Shampoo the scalp?” he whispered.

“No, thanks.”

“Singe the hair?” he coaxed.

“No, thanks.”

The barber made one more effort.

“Say,” he said in my ear, as a thing concerning himself and me alone, “your hair’s pretty well all falling out. You’d better let me just shampoo up the scalp a bit and stop up them follicles or pretty soon you won’t——”

“No, thank you,” I said, “not to-day.”

This was all the barber could stand. He

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## *Familiar Incidents*

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saw that I was just one of those miserable dead-beats who come to a barber's shop merely for a shave, and who carry away the scalp and the follicles and all the barber's perquisites as if they belonged to them.

In a second he had thrown me out of the chair.

"Next!" he shouted.

As I passed down the line of the barbers, I could see contempt in every eye while they turned on the full clatter of their revolving shampoo brushes and drowned the noise of my miserable exit in the roar of machinery.