J. STORER CLOUSTON

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EAN 8596547141587

DigiCat, 2022
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INTRODUCTORY

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In one of the cable tramway cars which, at a reverential pace, perambulate the city of Edinburgh, two citizens conversed. The winds without blew gustily and filled the air with sounds like a stream in flood, the traffic clattered noisily over the causeway, the car itself thrummed and rattled; but the voices of the two were hushed. Said the one —

"It's the most extraordinary thing ever I heard of."

"It's all that," said the other; "in fact, it's pairfectly incomprehensible."

"Mr. Walkingshaw of all people!"

"Of Walkingshaw and Gilliflower—that's the thing that fair takes my breath away!" added the other; as though the firm was an even surer guarantee of respectability than the honored name of the senior partner.

They shook their heads ominously. It was clear this was no ordinary portent they were discussing.

"Do you think has he taken to—?"

The first citizen finished his question by a crooking of his upturned little finger, one of those many delicate symbols by which the north Briton indicates a failing not uncommon in his climate.

"It's a curious thing," replied his friend, "that I haven't heard that given as an explanation. Of course he's not a teetotaler—"

"Oh, none ever insinuated that," put in the other, with the air of one who desired to do justice even to the most

erring.

"On the other hand, he's ay had the name of being one of the most respectable men in the town, just an example, they've always told me."

"I knew him fine myself, in a business way, and that's just the expression I'd have used—an Example."

"Respected by all."

"An elder, and what not."

"A fine business, he has."

"His daughter married a Ramornie of Pettigrew."

They shook their heads again, if possible more gravely than before.

"He must be going off his head."

"He must be gone, I'd say."

"Yon speech he made was an outrage to common sense and decency!"

"And about his son's marriage!"

"That's Andrew Walkingshaw—his partner?"

"Aye."

"Oh, you've heard the story, then? I wonder is it true?"

"I had it on the best authority."

They pursed their lips solemnly.

"The man's mad!"

"But think of letting him loose to make a public exhibition of himself! It's an awfu' end to a respected career—in fact, it's positively discouraging."

"You're right: you're right. If as respectable a liver as him ends that way—well, well!"

In this strain and with such comments (exceedingly natural under the circumstances) did his fellow-citizens

discuss the remarkable thing that befell Mr. Walkingshaw. And yet they could see only the outward symptoms or manifestations of this thing. Now that the full circumstances are made public, it will be generally conceded that few well-authenticated occurrences have ever at first sight seemed less probable. This has actually been advanced as an argument for their suppression; but since enough has already leaked out to whet the public curiosity, and indeed to lead to damaging misconceptions in a city so unused to phenomena other than meteorological, it is considered wisest that the unvarnished facts should be placed in the hands of a scrupulous editor and allowed to speak for themselves.

PART I

THE PRODIGAL FATHER

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CHAPTER I

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At a certain windy corner in the famous city of Edinburgh, a number of brass plates were affixed to the framework of a door. On the largest and brightest of them appeared the legend "Walkingshaw & Gilliflower, W.S."; and on no other sheet of brass in Scotland were more respectable names inscribed. For the benefit of the Sassenach and other foreigners, it may be explained that "W.S." is a condensation of "Writers to the Signet"—a species of beatified solicitor holding a position so esteemed, so enviable, and so intensely reputable that the only scandal previously whispered in connection with a member of this class proved innocently explicable upon the discovery that he was affianced to the lady's aunt. The building in which the firm had their office formed one end of an austere range of dark stone houses overlooking a street paved with cubes of granite and confronted by a precisely similar line of houses on the farther side. The whole sloped somewhat steeply down a hill, up which and down which a stimulating breeze careered and eddied during three hundred days of the year. Had you thrust your head out of the office windows and looked down the street, you could have seen, generally beneath a gray sky and through a haze of smoke, an

inspiring glimpse of distant sea with yet more distant hills beyond. But Mr. Walkingshaw had no time for looking gratis out of his window to see unprofitable views. The gray street had been the background to nearly fifty years of dignified labor on behalf of the most respectable clients.

His full name was James Heriot Walkingshaw, but it had been early recognized that "James" was too brief a designation and "Jimmie" too trivial for one of his parts and presence, and so he was universally known as Heriot Walkingshaw. His antecedents were as respectable as his clients. One of his eight great-great-grandfathers owned a landed estate in the county of Peebles, one of his maternal uncles was a theological professor in the University of Aberdeen, and his father before him had been a W.S. Young Heriot himself was brought up on porridge, the tawse, the Shorter Catechism, and an allowance of five shillings a week. His parents were both prudent and pious. Throughout such portions of the Sabbath as they did not spend with their offspring in their pew, they kept them indoors behind drawn blinds. His mother kissed young Heriot seldom and severely (with a cold smack like a hailstone), and never permitted him to remain ten minutes in the same room with a housemaid unchaperoned. His father never allowed him to sleep under more than two blankets, and locked the front door at nine o'clock in summer and six in winter.

The supreme merit of this system in insuring the survival of the fittest was seen in its results. Heriot's elder brother passed away at the age of two in the course of a severe winter. Clearly he would never have been a credit to oatmeal. His younger brother broke loose at nineteen,

pained his relatives exceedingly, and retired to a distant colony where the standard was lower. His name was never mentioned till at his decease it was found that he had left £30,000 to be divided among the survivors of the ordeal. And finally, here was Heriot, a credit to his parents, his porridge, and his Catechism—in a word, an Example.

One damp February morning, Mr. Walkingshaw, accompanied as usual by his eldest son, set forth from his decorous residence. It was one of a circle of stately houses, broken in two or three places to permit the sedatest kind of street to enter. The grave dignity of these mansions was accentuated by the straight, deep-hewn furrows at the junctions of the vast rectangular stones, and by the pediment and fluted pillars which every here and there gave one of them the appearance of a Greek temple dedicated to some chaste goddess. In the midst, a round, railed-in garden was full of lofty trees, very upright and dark, like monuments to the distinguished inhabitants.

Just as Mr. Walkingshaw and his son had got down the steps and reached the pavement, the door opened again behind them and a figure appeared which seemed to light the dull February morning with a ray of something like sunshine. Her dress was a warm golden brown; her face clear-skinned and fresh-colored, with bright eyes, a straight little nose, and, at that moment, eager, parted lips; her hair a coil of curling gold; her age nineteen.

"Father!" she cried, "you've forgotten your muffler!"

"Tut, tuts," muttered Mr. Walkingshaw.

He stopped and let her wind the muffler round his neck, while his son regarded the performance with a curiously

captious eye.

"Thanks, Jean," said Mr. Walkingshaw.

He threw the girl a brief nod, and the two resumed their walk. Jean stood for a minute on the steps with a smile half formed upon her lips, as though she were prepared to wave them a farewell; but neither man looked back, and the smile died away, the door closed behind her, and the morning became as raw as ever.

For a few minutes father and son walked together in silence. In Andrew's eye lurked the same suggestion of criticism, and in his parent's some consciousness of this and not a little consequent irritation. They were the same height —just under six feet—and there was a decided resemblance between Mr. Walkingshaw's portly gait and Andrew's dignified carriage, but otherwise they were not much alike. The father had a large and open countenance, very ruddy and fringed with the most respectable white whiskers; and something ample in his voice and eye and manner accorded with it admirably. Andrew's face also was full, but rather in places than comprehensively. The chief places were his cheeks and upper lip. This lip was perhaps his most striking characteristic. It was both full and long, meeting his cheeks at either end in a little dimple, and protruding above the lower lip. Beneath it his chin sloped sharply back and then abruptly shot forward again in the shape of a round aggressive little ball. His eye was cold and gray, his hair dark, his age six-and-thirty, and for the last few years he had been his father's partner. He was the first to break the silence.

"Why you don't see a respectable doctor, I can't imagine," said he.

"I went to Mackenzie. I went to Grant," replied Mr. Walkingshaw shortly. "A lot of good either of them did my gout!"

"Gout!" said Andrew. "And have you exchanged that for anything better? You ought to have stayed in bed to-day. I wonder you ventured out in the state that man's got you into."

The words might conceivably be taken to represent a very natural filial anxiety, but the voice was reminiscent of the consolation of Job. Mr. Walkingshaw had always been able to inspire his children with a respect so profound that it was a little difficult at times to distinguish it from awe. Even Andrew when he became his partner had not lost the attitude. But to-day his father accepted the rebuke without a murmur. In a moment the hard Scotch voice smote again —

"The idea of a man in your position going to an infernal quack like Professor Cyrus! Professor? Humph! The man's killing you."

Mr. Walkingshaw's ruddy face grew redder. The standard of common sense is high in Scotland; the humiliation in being taken in profound; the respect for the professional orthodoxies intense. And he had been the protagonist of everything sensible, orthodox, and prudent! He felt like a constable caught in the pantry.

"Cyrus is a man of remarkable—ah—ideas. He assures me I shall see the beneficial effects soon. Patience—patience; that is what he says. I—ah—have probably only

caught a little chill. I believe in Cyrus, Andrew, I believe in him."

Andrew received the explanation with outward respect. His father's eye had become formidable; but in silence his own expressed his opinion of this paltry defense. Presently he inquired—

"Would you like people to know who you're going to?"

Mr. Walkingshaw started.

"I'll trouble other folks to mind their own business," he said sharply; yet he cast an uncomfortable glance at his son.

"Oh, I'm not anxious they should know my family's escapades," said Andrew reassuringly.

But his gray eye had now a triumphant gleam, and his father realized he had no case left to go before the court. If people were to know—well, he would certainly be a less shining example. Mr. Walkingshaw of Walkingshaw and Gilliflower in the hands of a quack doctor! It would sound awful bad—awful bad. Little did he dream what people would be saying of that reputable Writer to the Signet three months later.

Business happened to be slack that afternoon, and at the early hour of four o'clock Mr. Walkingshaw resumed his overcoat and muffler. As Mr. Thomieson, his confidential clerk, decorously tucked the scarf beneath the velvet collar, he offered a word or two of respectful sympathy.

"Far the wisest thing to go home, sir. But will you not take a cab? It's an awful like day to be out with a chill on ye."

Mr. Walkingshaw perceived his junior partner gazing on him in severe silence, and defiantly decided to walk. Yet as he paced homewards he could not but admit, in the unquiet recesses of his own mind, that it certainly was an odd sort of chill. He felt—well, he found it hard to tell exactly how he felt—rather as though he had swallowed some ounces of quicksilver which kept flashing and running about inside him with every step he took. Suppose Cyrus's wonderful new system were actually to prove dangerous to the constitution, possibly even to the life, of his august, confiding patron? You could not always know your luck, however deserving you might be. The tower of Siloam fell both upon the righteous and the unrighteous. What would people say if Professor Cyrus metaphorically fell on him? Heriot Walkingshaw had more at stake than mere existence. He had a character to lose.

The sight of his house, so dignified and so permanent, soothed him a little. As he hung his coat upon the substantial rack in the dark and spacious hall, he was soothed still further. Ascending to his drawing-room, the thick carpet underfoot completed his tranquillity. Surely nothing disconcerting could happen to a man who owned such a house as this. But alas! regrettable episodes have a habit, like migrant birds, of arriving in companies.

CHAPTER II

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Mrs. Walkingshaw had been dead for many years, and in her stead Heriot's maiden sister, a thin, elderly lady of

exemplary views and conduct, ruled her household. As her brother ruled her, he found the arrangement worked admirably.

"Are you not coming out with me in the carriage?" said she to her niece that afternoon.

Jean excused herself. She had letters she positively must write; and so the two tall horses pranced off, bearing in the very large and very shiny carriage only the exemplary lady. As she heard them clatter off over the resounding granite, Jean gave a little skip. Her eyes danced too and her lips smiled mysteriously. She ran upstairs like a whirlwind and had the drawing-room door shut behind her before she paused. Only then did she seem to feel safely alone and not in the carriage shopping. The room was very long, and very wide, and immensely high, with three tall windows down one side and substantial furniture purchased in the heyday of the Victorian epoch. The slim, fair-haired figure was quite lost in the space considered suitable by an early nineteenth-century architect for the accommodation of a Scottish lady; and the fire made much more of a display, glowing in the gloom of that raw February afternoon.

Jean sat by a little writing-table and took up a pen. Then she waited, evidently for ideas to come. Ten minutes later they arrived. The door was softly opened, a voice respectably subdued announced the name of "Mr. Vernon," and the duties of the pen were over.

The gentleman who entered made a remarkable contrast to the sedate upholstery. He had a mop of brown hair upon a large and well-shaped head, a broad face with rugged, striking features, very bright blue eyes, a dashing cavalier

mustache, and a most engaging smile. His clothes were light of hue and very loose, his figure was of medium height and strongly built, his collar wide open at the neck, and his tie a large silk butterfly of an artistic shade of brown. Altogether he was a most improbable person to find calling upon a daughter of Mr. Heriot Walkingshaw.

He gave Jean's hand the grasp of a friend, but his eyes looked on her with a more than friendly light in them. When he spoke, his voice was as pleasant as his smile, and his accents were those of that portion of Britain not yet entirely occupied by the victors of Bannockburn.

"It's very good of you to stay in," he said.

"Oh, I wasn't going out in any case," said Jean demurely.

She seated herself in one corner of the sofa, and the young man, after hesitating for an instant between a seat by her side and a chair close by, and failing to catch her eye to guide him, chose the chair, and for the moment looked unhappy.

"I've come to say good-by," he began.

She looked up quickly.

"Are you going away?"

He nodded his brown mop.

"Yes, I'm off to London again."

"For good?"

"I hope so; anyhow, it can't be for much worse than I've done here."

"Haven't your pictures been—been appreciated here?" she asked.

"They haven't been sold," he said, with a short laugh.

"What a shame! Oh, Mr. Vernon, I do think people might have had better taste."

"So do I," he smiled, "but they haven't had. I've made nothing here but friends."

He had a musical voice, rather deep, and very readily expressive of what he strongly felt. His last sentence rang in Jean's ears like a declaration of love. Her eyes fell and her color rose.

"We have all been very glad to see you."

He shook his head; his eyes fastened on her all the time.

"No, you haven't."

She looked up, but meeting that devouring gaze, looked down again.

"Not all of you," he added. "Your father disapproves of me, your eldest brother detests me, and your aunt distrusts me. It's only you and Frank who have been my friends."

Frank was her soldier brother, and Jean adored him. She thought she could never care for any one but a soldier, till she encountered art and Lucas Vernon.

"Yes, Frank certainly does like you very much indeed," she said warmly.

"Don't you?"

"Yes," she answered firmly.

He smiled and bent towards her.

"Your hand on it!"

She held out her hand, and he took it and kept it.

(At that moment Mr. Walkingshaw was opening his front door.)

For a minute they sat in silence, and then she tried gently to draw the hand away.

"Let me keep it for a little!" he pleaded. "I'm going away. I shan't hold it again for Heaven knows how long."

His voice was so caressing that she ceased to grudge him five small fingers.

(Mr. Walkingshaw had removed his muffler and was hanging up his coat.)

"Are you at all sorry I'm going?"

"Yes," murmured Jean, "Frank and I—we'll both miss you."

The artist murmured too, but very indistinctly. The idea he expressed thus inadequately was, "Hang Frank!" But she heard the next word too plainly for her self-possession.

"Jean!"

(Mr. Walkingshaw was now ascending his well-carpeted staircase.)

She gave him one glance which she meant for reproof; but when he saw her eyes, so loving and a little moist, he covered the short space between them with one movement, and was on his knees before her.

"Do you love me?" he whispered.

Her head bent over his, and she answered very faintly something like "Yes."

Mr. Walkingshaw entered his drawing-room.

For a moment there was a painful pause. Jean's face had turned a becoming shade of crimson, and the artist was on his feet. Naturally the woman spoke first.

"I—I didn't expect you back so soon, father."

"So I perceive," said Mr. Walkingshaw.

The young man turned to him with creditable composure.

"One can hardly judge of the effect in this light," said he.

Mr. Walkingshaw had heard of people becoming insane under the stress of a sudden shock, and he wondered uneasily whether this misfortune had befallen Lucas Vernon or himself. The artist perceived his success, and hope began to rise afresh. He cocked his head professionally on one side and examined the confounded girl.

"We must try the pose in my studio."

Jean also saw the dawn of hope.

"May I inquire what you are talking about?" demanded her father.

"Miss Walkingshaw has promised to sit to me for her portrait," explained the artist. "We were trying one or two positions."

Mr. Walkingshaw breathed somewhat heavily, but said nothing. Jean's color began to subside.

"Mr. Vernon was arranging my hands," she contributed towards his enlightenment.

Mr. Vernon was now gazing on her in the attitude which he had learnt from plays and poems conveyed to the laity the best conception of artistic fervor.

"The head a little more to the right!" he exclaimed. "The hands crossed! A smile, please! Now, sir, how do you like that?"

Mr. Walkingshaw ignored the question altogether and addressed his daughter.

"If Mr. Vernon can give any reasons why he should paint your portrait, I think he had better give them to me before the matter goes further."

His formidable eye supplied the addendum, "And you leave the room!"

She obeyed, and the painter was left with this singularly favorable opportunity of obtaining a commission at last.

CHAPTER III

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"Well, sir?" said Mr. Walkingshaw.

Lucas was unused to the subtleties of diplomacy, but it seemed to him an evident case for tact.

"What do you think about it yourself?" he began cautiously.

"I think," replied the W.S., "that you'd be better back in England."

His eye again spoke for him, and this time it said, "There is no further use in attempting to deceive me."

The artist took the hint. His strong, pleasant face became a mirror reflecting the very truth; his blue eyes were filled with a light brighter even than the inspiration of art; his mellow voice burst out abruptly—

"I love Jean!"

The effect was rather like discharging a cannon and bringing down a scrap of plaster.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Walkingshaw. "You mean my daughter?"

"I should think I do!"

"I merely asked for information, Mr. Vernon."

"Then I can guarantee your information!" Lucas smiled frankly, but he might as well have smiled at the hat-rack in the hall. "I'm quite aware you don't think me good enough for her—and I agree with you. But if it comes to that, who is?

You may say my name's neither Turner nor Rubens; you may think it's like my dashed impudence asking you to let me make a short cut to heaven across your hearth—"

It was at this point that Mr. Walkingshaw discharged his ordnance.

"What is your income?" he inquired coldly.

His aim was more accurate. The artist descended to earth with a thud.

"My *income*?" he gasped.

"Your income," repeated the bombardier.

The artist ran his fingers convulsively through his hair.

"Now, what the deuce should I put it at?"

"An approximately correct figure," suggested Mr. Walkingshaw.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't the least idea."

"A thousand?"

"Oh, good God, no!"

"A hundred?"

"Oh, more than that."

"Can't you suggest a figure yourself?"

"Well, let's say that in a good year I make anything up to three or four hundred pounds, and in a bad year anything down to fifty or sixty."

"We'll say that if you like. Do you expect any legacies to fall in to you—anything of that kind?"

"Unfortunately I don't."

Mr. Walkingshaw regarded him with contemptuous severity.

"Then you propose to marry my daughter on maybe fifty or sixty pounds a year?"

"I told you that was in a bad year," protested the artist.

"Thank you, but I don't want any of your fluctuating incomes for my girl. I don't care if you earned ten thousand pounds this year. So long as you can't guarantee that to last, you're no better than a speculator—a hand-to-mouth, don't-know-where-you-are-to-morrow sort of person. Now, that sort of thing *won't do*, Mr. Vernon. Before you next think of marrying a girl in my daughter's position, let me give you this bit of advice: learn to paint your pictures on some kind of proper business principles. If you do them, say, once a month and sell them at a standard price—just as other folks have to manufacture and sell their goods—you'll not find yourself in the same ridiculous position you're in at this moment."

Mr. Walkingshaw rose to indicate that the interview was at an end; but the artist's endurance ended first.

"Mr. Walkingshaw! Did you ever *make* anything in your life?"

The W.S. stared at him.

"I have made most of what I possess, sir."

"Pooh! You're talking of money. Does your mind never run on anything but money? I mean, have you ever made a hat or a shoe, or a book or a picture, or even a cheese? Have you ever actually turned out anything that was the least use or pleasure to anybody?"

Vernon's blue eyes were bent upon him in such an extraordinarily intense and flashing manner that Mr. Walkingshaw found himself compelled to answer.

"That kind of thing is—ah—not in my line."

"Then," burst forth the artist, "you can no more judge of my work than a toasting-fork can judge of a steam engine. The woman who cooks your dinner understands more than you do. She knows better than to think it costs no more time and trouble to cook an omelette than boil an egg. A picture a month, and the same price for each! Confound it, Mr. Walkingshaw, you make me ashamed of you!"

"Do you imagine, sir, that that affects me?"

"If I were you, I'd prefer my son-in-law to respect me."

Mr. Walkingshaw positively jumped.

"You mean to—er—"

"Marry her, whether you like it or not! I'm in love—and she loves me! There's not the least use trying to explain to you what love means. It would be like trying to explain a cigar to a chicken. You're too respectable. You can't understand."

The tirade ceased abruptly, and the young man smiled again upon the petrified Writer to the Signet.

"I am going back to London to-night. Just give me a year or two, Mr. Walkingshaw. I'll make an income for her."

Mr. Walkingshaw regained his senses.

"You will never be admitted inside this house in your life again, sir. You will never marry *my* daughter; and mind you, you needn't flatter yourself she will correspond with you or anything of that kind. My children have been decently brought up. What I say is done; and what I say shan't be done, is not done!"

He had recovered his formidableness now, and the artist's face fell. For a moment he looked gloomily at his father-in-law elect, and then he turned for the door.