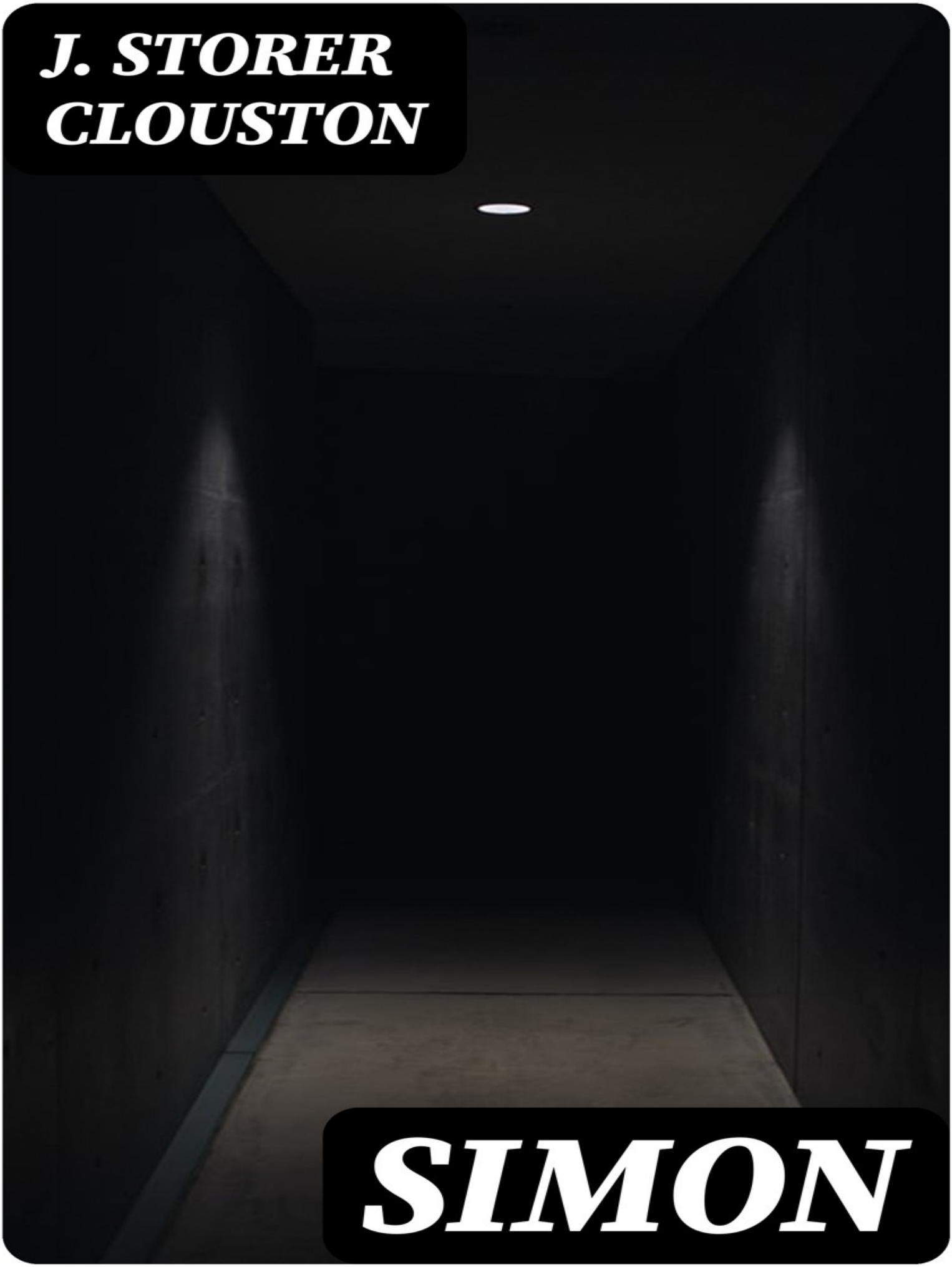
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THE SOLITARY PASSENGER

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The train had come a long journey and the afternoon was wearing on. The passenger in the last third class compartment but one, looking out of the window sombrely and intently, saw nothing now but desolate brown hills and a winding lonely river, very northern looking under the autumnal sky.

He was alone in the carriage, and if any one had happened to study his movements during the interminable journey, they would have concluded that for some reason he seemed to have a singularly strong inclination for solitude. In fact this was at least the third compartment he had occupied, for whenever a fellow traveller entered, he unostentatiously descended, and in a moment had slipped, also unostentatiously, into an empty carriage. Finally he had selected one at the extreme end of the train, a judicious choice which had ensured privacy for the last couple of hours.

When the train at length paused in the midst of the moorlands and for some obscure reason this spot was selected for the examination of tickets, another feature of this traveller's character became apparent. He had no ticket, he confessed, but named the last station as his place of departure and the next as his destination. Being an entirely respectable looking person, his statement was

accepted and he slipped the change for half a crown into his pocket; just as he had done a number of times previously in the course of his journey. Evidently the passenger was of an economical as well as of a secretive disposition.

As the light began to fade and the grey sky to change into a deeper grey, and the lighted train to glitter through the darkening moors, and he could see by his watch that their distant goal was now within an hour's journey, the man showed for the first time signs of a livelier interest. He peered out keenly into the dusk as though recognising old landmarks, and now and then he shifted in his seat restlessly and a little nervously.

He was a man of middle age or upwards, of middle height, and thickset. Round his neck he wore a muffler, so drawn up as partially to conceal the lower part of his face, and a black felt hat was drawn down over his eyes. Between them could be seen only the gleam of his eyes, the tip of his nose, and the stiff hairs of a grizzled moustache.

Out of his overcoat pocket he pulled a pipe and for a moment looked at it doubtfully, and then, as if the temptation were irresistible, he took out a tobacco pouch too. It was almost flat and he jealously picked up a shred that fell on the floor, and checked himself at last when the bowl was half filled. And then for a while he smoked very slowly, savouring each whiff.

When they stopped at the last station or two, the reserved and exclusive disposition of this traveller became still more apparent. Not only was he so muffled up as to make recognition by an unwelcome acquaintance exceedingly difficult, but so long as they paused at the

stations he sat with his face resting on his hand, and when they moved on again, an air of some relief was apparent.

But a still more remarkable instance of this sensitive passion for privacy appeared when the train stopped at the ticket platform just outside its final destination. Even as they were slowing down, he fell on his knees and then stretched himself at full length on the floor, and when the door was flung open for an instant, the compartment was to all appearances empty. Only when they were well under way again did this retiring traveller emerge from beneath the seat.

And when he did emerge, his conduct continued to be of a piece with this curious performance. He glanced out of the window for an instant at the lights of the platform ahead, and the groups under them, and the arch of the station roof against the night sky, and then swiftly stepped across the carriage and gently opened the door on the wrong side. By the time the train was fairly at rest, the door had been as quietly closed again and the man was picking his way over the sleepers in the darkness, past the guard's van and away from the station and publicity. Certainly he had succeeded in achieving a singularly economical and private journey.

For a few minutes he continued to walk back along the line, and then after a wary look all round him, he sprang up the low bank at the side, threw his leg over a wire fence, and with infinite care began to make his way across a stubble field. As he approached the wall on the further side of the field his precautions increased. He listened intently, crouched down once or twice, and when at last he reached

the wall, he peered over it very carefully before he mounted and dropped on the other side.

"Well," he murmured, "I'm here, by God, at last!"

He was standing now in a road on the outskirts of the town. On the one hand it led into a dim expanse of darkened country; on the other the lights of the town twinkled. Across the road, a few villas stood back amidst trees, with gates opening on to a footpath, the outlying houses of the town; and the first lamp-post stood a little way down this path. The man crossed the road and turned townwards, walking slowly and apparently at his ease. What seemed to interest him now was not his own need for privacy but the houses and gates he was passing. At one open gate in particular he half paused and then seemed to spy something ahead that altered his plans. Under a lamp-post a figure appeared to be lingering, and at the sight of this, the man drew his hat still more closely over his face and moved on.

As he drew near the lamp the forms of two youths became manifest, apparently loitering there idly. The man kept his eyes on the ground, passed them at a brisk walk and went on his way into the town.

"Damn them!" he muttered.

This incident seemed to have deranged his plans a little for his movements during the next half hour were so purposeless as to suggest that he was merely putting in time. Down one street and up another he walked, increasing his pace when he had to pass any fellow walkers, and then again falling slow at certain corners and looking round him curiously as though those dark lanes and half-lit streets were reminiscent.

Even seen in the light of the infrequent lamps and the rays from thinly blinded windows, it was evidently but a small country town of a hard, grey stone, northern type. The ends of certain lanes seemed to open into the empty country itself, and one could hear the regular cadence of waves hard by upon a shore.

"It doesn't seem to have changed much," said the man to himself.

He worked his way round, like one quite familiar with the route he followed, till at length he drew near the same quiet country road whence he had started. This time he stopped for a few minutes in the thickest shadow and scanned each dim circle of radiance ahead. Nobody seemed now to be within the rays of the lamps or to be moving in the darkness between. He went on warily till he had come nearly to the same open gate where he had paused before, and then there fell upon his ears the sound of steps behind him and he stopped again and looked sharply over his shoulder.

Somebody was following, but at a little distance off, and after hesitating for an instant, he seemed to make up his mind to risk it, and turned swiftly and stealthily through the gates. A short drive of some pretentions ran between trees and then curved round towards the house, but there was no lodge or any sign of a possible watcher, and the man advanced for a few yards swiftly and confidently enough. And then he stopped abruptly. Under the shade of the trees the drive ahead was pitch dark, but footsteps and voices were certainly coming from the house. In an instant he had vanished into the belt of plantation along one side of the drive.

The footsteps and voices ceased, and then the steps began again, timidly at first and then hurriedly. The belt of shrubs and trees was just thick enough to hide a man perfectly on a moonless cloudy night like this. Yet on either side the watcher could see enough of what was beyond to note that he stood between the dark drive on one hand and a lighter space of open garden on the other, and he could even catch a glimpse of the house against the sky. Light shone brightly from the fanlight over the front door, and less distinctly from one window upstairs and through the slats of a blind in a downstairs room. For a moment he looked in that direction and then intently watched the drive.

The footsteps by this time were almost on the run. The vague forms of two women passed swiftly and he could see their faces dimly turned towards him as they hurried by. They passed through the gates and were gone, and then a minute later men's voices in the road cried out a greeting. And after that the silence fell profound.

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THE PROCURATOR FISCAL

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The procurator fiscal breakfasted at 8.30, punctually, and at 8.30 as usual he entered his severely upholstered dining-room and shut the door behind him. The windows looked into a spacious garden with a belt of trees leading up to the house from the gate, and this morning Mr. Rattar, who was a

machine for habit, departed in one trifling particular from his invariable routine. Instead of sitting straight down to the business of breakfasting, he stood for a minute or two at the window gazing into the garden, and then he came to the table very thoughtfully.

No man in that northern county was better known or more widely respected than Mr. Simon Rattar. In person, he was a thickset man of middle height and elderly middle age, with cold steady eyes and grizzled hair. His clean shaved face was chiefly remarkable for the hardness of his tight-shut mouth, and the obstinacy of the chin beneath it. Professionally, he was lawyer to several of the larger landowners and factor on their estates, and lawyer and adviser also to many other people in various stations in life. Officially, he was procurator fiscal for the county, the setter in motion of all criminal processes, and generalissimo, so to speak, of the police; and one way and another, he had the reputation of being a very comfortably well off gentleman indeed.

As for his abilities, they were undeniably considerable, of the hard, cautious, never-caught-asleep order; and his taciturn manner and way of drinking in everything said to him while he looked at you out of his steady eyes, and then merely nodded and gave a significant little grunt at the end, added immensely to his reputation for profound wisdom. People were able to quote few definite opinions uttered by "Silent Simon," but any that could be quoted were shrewdness itself.

He was a bachelor, and indeed, it was difficult for the most fanciful to imagine Silent Simon married. Even in his

youth he had not been attracted by the other sex, and his own qualities certainly did not attract them. Not that there was a word to be said seriously against him. Hard and shrewd though he was, his respectability was extreme and his observance of the conventions scrupulous to a fault. He was an elder of the Kirk, a non-smoker, an abstemious drinker (to be an out and out teetotaler would have been a little too remarkable in those regions for a man of Mr. Rattar's conventional tastes), and indeed in all respects he trod that sober path that leads to a semi-public funeral and a vast block of granite in the parish kirkyard.

He had acquired his substantial villa and large garden by a very shrewd bargain a number of years ago, and he lived there with just the decency that his condition in life enjoined, but with not a suspicion of display beyond it. He kept a staff of two competent and respectable girls, just enough to run a house of that size, but only just; and when he wanted to drive abroad he hired a conveyance exactly suitable to the occasion from the most respectable hotel. His life, in short, was ordered to the very best advantage possible.

Enthusiastic devotion to such an extremely exemplary gentleman was a little difficult, but in his present housemaid, Mary MacLean, he had a girl with a strong Highland strain of fidelity to a master, and an instinctive devotion to his interests, even if his person was hardly the chieftain her heart demanded. She was a soft voiced, anxious looking young woman, almost pretty despite her nervous high strung air, and of a quiet and modest demeanour.

Soon after her master had begun breakfast, Mary entered the dining-room with an apologetic air, but a conscientious eye.

"Begging your pardon, sir," she began, "but I thought I ought to tell you that when cook and me was going out to the concert last night we thought we saw *something* in the drive."

Mr. Rattar looked up at her sharply and fixed his cold eyes on her steadily for a moment, never saying a word. It was exactly his ordinary habit, and she had thought she was used to it by now, yet this morning she felt oddly disconcerted. Then it struck her that perhaps it was the red cut on his chin that gave her this curious feeling. Silent Simon's hand was as steady as a rock and she never remembered his having cut himself shaving before; certainly not as badly as this.

"Saw 'something'?" he repeated gruffly. "What do you mean?"

"It looked like a man, sir, and it seemed to move into the trees almost as quick as we saw it!"

"Tuts!" muttered Simon.

"But there was two friends of ours meeting us in the road," she hurried on, "and they thought they saw a man going in at the gate!"

Her master seemed a little more impressed.

"Indeed?" said he.

"So I thought it was my duty to tell you, sir."

"Quite right," said he.

"For I felt sure it couldn't just be a gentleman coming to see you, sir, or he wouldn't have gone into the trees."

"Of course not," he agreed briefly. "Nobody came to see me."

Mary looked at him doubtfully and hesitated for a moment.

"Didn't you even hear anything, sir?" she asked in a lowered voice.

Her master's quick glance made her jump.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because, sir, I found footsteps in the gravel this morning—where it's soft with the rain, sir, just under the library window."

Mr. Rattar looked first hard at her and then at his plate. For several seconds he answered nothing, and then he said:

"I did hear some one."

There was something both in his voice and in his eye as he said this that was not quite like the usual Simon Rattar. Mary began to feel a sympathetic thrill.

"Did you look out of the window, sir?" she asked in a hushed voice.

Her master nodded and pursed his lips.

"But you didn't see him, sir?"

"No," said he.

"Who could it have been, sir?"

"I have been wondering," he said, and then he threw a sudden glance at her that made her hurry for the door. It was not that it was an angry look, but that it was what she called so "queer-like."

Just as she went out she noted another queer-like circumstance. Mr. Rattar had stretched out his hand towards the toast rack while he spoke. The toast stuck between the

bars, and she caught a glimpse of an angry twitch that upset the rack with a clatter. Never before had she seen the master do a thing of that kind.

A little later the library bell called her. Mr. Rattar had finished breakfast and was seated beside the fire with a bundle of legal papers on a small table beside him, just as he always sat, absorbed in work, before he started for his office. The master's library impressed Mary vastly. The furniture was so substantial, new-looking, and conspicuous for the shininess of the wood and the brightness of the red morocco seats to the chairs. And it was such a tidy room—no litter of papers or books, nothing ever out of place, no sign even of pipe, tobacco jar, cigarette or cigar. The only concession to the vices were the ornate ash tray and the massive globular glass match box on the square table in the middle of the room, and they were manifestly placed there for the benefit of visitors merely. Even they, Mary thought, were admirable as ornaments, and she was concerned to note that there was no nice red-headed bundle of matches in the glass match box this morning. What had become of them she could not imagine, but she resolved to repair this blemish as soon as the master had left the house.

"I don't want you to go gossiping about this fellow who came into the garden, last night," he began.

"Oh, no, sir!" said she.

Simon shot her a glance that seemed compounded of doubt and warning.

"As procurator fiscal, it is my business to inquire into such affairs. I'll see to it."

"Oh, yes, sir; I know," said she. "It seemed so impudent like of the man coming into the fiscal's garden of all places!"

Simon grunted. It was his characteristic reply when no words were absolutely necessary.

"That's all," said he, "don't gossip! Remember, if we want to catch the man, the quieter we keep the better."

Mary went out, impressed with the warning, but still more deeply impressed with something else. Gossip with cook of course was not to be counted as gossip in the prohibited sense, and when she returned to the kitchen, she unburdened her Highland heart.

"The master's no himsel'!" she said. "I tell you, Janet, never have I seen Mr. Rattar look the way he looked at breakfast, nor yet the way he looked in the library!"

Cook was a practical person and apt to be a trifle unsympathetic.

"He couldna be bothered with your blethering most likely!" said she.

"Oh, it wasna that!" said Mary very seriously. "Just think yoursel' how would you like to be watched through the window at the dead of night as you were sitting in your chair? The master's feared of yon man, Janet!"

Even Janet was a little impressed by her solemnity.

"It must have taken something to make silent Simon feared!" said she.

Mary's voice fell.

"It's my opinion, the master knows more than he let on to me. The thought that came into my mind when he was talking to me was just—'The man feels he's being *watched*!'"

"Oh, get along wi' you and your Hieland fancies!" said cook, but she said it a little uncomfortably.

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THE HEIR

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At 9.45 precisely Mr. Rattar arrived at his office, just as he had arrived every morning since his clerks could remember. He nodded curtly as usual to his head clerk, Mr. Ison, and went into his room. His letters were always laid out on his desk and from twenty minutes to half an hour were generally spent by him in running through them. Then he would ring for Mr. Ison and begin to deal with the business of the day. But on this morning the bell went within twelve minutes, as Mr. Ison (a most precise person) noted on the clock.

"Bring the letter book," said Mr. Rattar. "And the business ledger."

"Letter book and business ledger?" repeated Mr. Ison, looking a little surprised.

Mr. Rattar nodded.

The head clerk turned away and then paused and glanced at the bundle of papers Mr. Rattar had brought back with him. He had expected these to be dealt with first thing.

"About this Thomson business—" he began.

"It can wait."

The lawyer's manner was peremptory and the clerk fetched the letter book and ledger. These contained, between them, a record of all the recent business of the firm, apart from public business and the affairs of one large estate. What could be the reason for such a comprehensive examination, Mr. Ison could not divine, but Mr. Rattar never gave reasons unless he chose, and the clerk who would venture to ask him was not to be found on the staff of Silent Simon.

In a minute or two the head clerk returned with the books. This time he was wearing his spectacles and his first glance through them at Mr. Rattar gave him an odd sensation. The lawyer's mouth was as hard set and his eyes were as steady as ever. Yet something about his expression seemed a little unusual. Some unexpected business had turned up to disturb him, Mr. Ison felt sure; and indeed, this seemed certain from his request for the letter book and ledger. He now noticed also the cut on his chin, a sure sign that something had interrupted the orderly tenor of Simon Rattar's life, if ever there was one. Mr. Ison tried to guess whose business could have taken such a turn as to make Silent Simon cut himself with his razor, but though he had many virtues, imagination was not among them and he had to confess that it was fairly beyond James Ison.

And yet, curiously enough, his one remark to a fellow clerk was not unlike the comment of the imaginative Mary MacLean.

"The boss has a kin' of unusual look to-day. There was something kin' of suspicious in that eye of his—rather as though he thought someone was watching him."

Mr. Rattar had been busy with the books for some twenty minutes when his head clerk returned.

"Mr. Malcolm Cromarty to see you, sir," he said.

Silent Simon looked at him hard, and it was evident to his clerk that his mind had been extraordinarily absorbed, for he simply repeated in a curious way:

"Mr. *Malcolm* Cromarty?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Ison, and then as even this seemed scarcely to be comprehended, he added, "Sir Reginald's cousin."

"Ah, of course!" said Mr. Rattar. "Well, show him in."

The young man who entered was evidently conscious of being a superior person. From the waviness of his hair and the studied negligence of his tie (heliotrope with a design in old gold), it seemed probable that he had literary or artistic claims to be superior to the herd. And from the deference with which Mr. Ison had pronounced his name and his own slightly condescending manner, it appeared that he felt himself in other respects superior to Mr. Rattar. He was of medium height, slender, and dark-haired. His features were remarkably regular, and though his face was somewhat small, there could be no doubt that he was extremely good looking, especially to a woman's eye, who would be more apt than a fellow man to condone something a little supercilious in his smile.

The attire of Mr. Malcolm Cromarty was that of the man of fashion dressed for the country, with the single exception of the tie which intimated to the discerning that here was no young man of fashion merely, but likewise a young man of ideas. That he had written, or at least was going to write, or

else that he painted or was about to paint, was quite manifest. The indications, however, were not sufficiently pronounced to permit one to suspect him of fiddling, or even of being about to fiddle.

This young gentleman's manner as he shook hands with the lawyer and then took a chair was on the surface cheerful and politely condescending. Yet after his first greeting, and when he was seated under Simon's inscrutable eye, there stole into his own a hint of quite another emotion. If ever an eye revealed apprehension it was Malcolm Cromarty's at that instant.

"Well, Mr. Rattar, here I am again, you see," said he with a little laugh; but it was not quite a spontaneous laugh.

"I see, Mr. Cromarty," said Simon laconically.

"You have been expecting to hear from me before, I suppose," the young man went on, "but the fact is I've had an idea for a story and I've been devilish busy sketching it out."

Simon grunted and gave a little nod. One would say that he was studying his visitor with exceptional attention.

"Ideas come to one at the most inconvenient times," the young author explained with a smile, and yet with a certain hurried utterance not usually associated with smiles, "one just has to shoot the bird when he happens to come over your head, don't you know, you can't send in beaters after that kind of fowl, Mr. Rattar. And when he does come out, there you are! You have to make hay while the sun shines."

Again the lawyer nodded, and again he made no remark. The apprehension in his visitor's eye increased, his smile died away, and suddenly he exclaimed:

"For God's sake, Mr. Rattar, say something! I meant honestly to pay you back—I felt sure I could sell that last thing of mine before now, but not a word yet from the editor I sent it to!"

Still there came only a guarded grunt from Simon and the young man went on with increasing agitation.

"You won't give me away to Sir Reginald, will you? He's been damned crusty with me lately about money matters, as it is. If you make me desperate——!" He broke off and gazed dramatically into space for a moment, and then less dramatically at his lawyer.

Silent Simon was proverbially cautious, but it seemed to his visitor that his demeanour this morning exceeded all reasonable limits. For nearly a minute he answered absolutely nothing, and then he said very slowly and deliberately:

"I think it would be better, Mr. Cromarty, if you gave me a brief, explicit statement of how you got into this mess."

"Dash it, you know too well—" began Cromarty.

"It would make you realise your own position more clearly," interrupted the lawyer. "You want me to assist you, I take it?"

"Rather—if you will!"

"Well then, please do as I ask you. You had better start at the beginning of your relations with Sir Reginald."

Malcolm Cromarty's face expressed surprise, but the lawyer's was distinctly less severe, and he began readily enough:

"Well, of course, as you know, my cousin Charles Cromarty died about 18 months ago and I became the heir

to the baronetcy—" he broke off and asked, "Do you mean you want me to go over all that?"

Simon nodded, and he went on:

"Sir Reginald was devilish good at first—in his own patronising way, let me stay at Keldale as often and as long as I liked, made me an allowance and so on; but there was always this fuss about my taking up something a little more conventional than literature. Ha, ha!" The young man laughed in a superior way and then looked apprehensively at the other. "But I suppose you agree with Sir Reginald?"

Simon pursed his lips and made a non-committal sound.

"Well, anyhow, he wanted me to be called to the Bar or something of that kind, and then there was a fuss about money—his ideas of an allowance are rather old fashioned, as you know. And then you were good enough to help me with that loan, and—well, that's all, isn't it?"

Mr. Rattar had been listening with extreme attention. He now nodded, and a smile for a moment seemed to light his chilly eyes.

"I see that you quite realise your position, Mr. Cromarty," he said.

"Realise it!" cried the young man. "My God, I'm in a worse hole——" he broke off abruptly.

"Worse than you have admitted to me?" said Simon quickly and again with a smile in his eye.

Malcolm Cromarty hesitated, "Sir Reginald is so damned narrow! If he wants to drive me to the devil—well, let him! But I say, Mr. Rattar, what are you going to do?"

For some moments Simon said nothing. At length he answered:

"I shall not press for repayment at present."

His visitor rose with a sigh of relief and as he said good-bye his condescending manner returned as readily as it had gone.

"Good morning and many thanks," said he, and then hesitated for an instant. "You couldn't let me have a very small cheque, just to be going on with, could you?"

"Not this morning, Mr. Cromarty."

Mr. Cromarty's look of despair returned.

"Well," he cried darkly as he strode to the door, "people who treat a man in my position like this are responsible for—er——!" The banging of the door left their precise responsibility in doubt.

Simon Rattar gazed after him with an odd expression. It seemed to contain a considerable infusion of complacency. And then he rang for his clerk.

"Get me the Cromarty estate letter book," he commanded.

The book was brought and this time he had about ten minutes to himself before the clerk entered again.

"Mr. Cromarty of Stanesland to see you, sir," he announced.

This announcement seemed to set the lawyer thinking hard. Then in his abrupt way he said:

"Show him in."

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THE MAN FROM THE WEST

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Mr. Rattar's second visitor was of a different type. Mr. Cromarty of Stanesland stood about 6 feet two and had nothing artistic in his appearance, being a lean strapping man in the neighbourhood of forty, with a keen, thin, weather-beaten face chiefly remarkable for its straight sharp nose, compressed lips, reddish eye-brows, puckered into a slight habitual frown, and the fact that the keen look of the whole was expressed by only one of his eyes, the other being a good imitation but unmistakeably glass. The whole effect of the face, however, was singularly pleasing to the discerning critic. An out of door, reckless, humorous, honest personality was stamped on every line of it and every movement of the man. When he spoke his voice had a marked tinge of the twang of the wild west that sounded a little oddly on the lips of a country gentleman in these northern parts. He wore an open flannel collar, a shooting coat, well cut riding breeches and immaculate leather leggings, finished off by a most substantial pair of shooting boots. Unlike Mr. Malcolm Cromarty, he evidently looked upon his visit as expected.

"Good morning, Mr. Rattar," said he, throwing his long form into the clients' chair as he spoke. "Well, I guess you've got some good advice for me this morning."

Simon Rattar was proverbially cautious, but to-day his caution struck his visitor as quite remarkable.

"Um," he grunted. "Advice, Mr. Cromarty? Umph!"

"Don't trouble beating about the bush," said the tall man. "I've been figuring things out myself and so far as I can see,

it comes to this:—that loan from Sir Reginald put me straight in the meantime, but I've got to cut down expense all round to keep straight, and I've got to pay him back. Of course you know his way when it's one of the clan he's dealing with. 'My dear Ned, no hurry whatever. If you send my heir a cheque some day after I'm gone it will have the added charm of surprise!' Well, that's damned decent, but hardly business. I want to get the whole thing off my chest. Got the statement made up?"

Simon shook his head.

"Very sorry, Mr. Cromarty. Haven't had time yet."

"Hell!" said Mr. Cromarty, though in a cheerful voice, and then added with an engaging smile, "Pardon me, Mr. Rattar. I'm trying to get educated out of strong language, but, Lord, at my time of life it's not so damned—I mean dashed easy!"

Even Simon Rattar's features relaxed for an instant into a smile.

"And who is educating you?" he enquired.

Mr. Cromarty looked a little surprised.

"Who but the usual lady? Gad, I've told you before of my sister's well meant efforts. It's a stiff job making a retired cow puncher into a high grade laird. However, I can smoke without spitting now, which is a step on the road towards being a Lord Chesterfield."

He smiled humorously, stretched out his long legs and added:

"It's a nuisance, your not having that statement ready. When I've got to do business I like pushing it through quick. That's an American habit I don't mean to get rid of, Mr. Rattar."

Mr. Rattar nodded his approval.

"Certainly not," said he.

"I've put down my car," his visitor continued. "Drive a buggy now—beg its pardon, a trap, and a devilish nice little mare I've got in her too. In fact, there are plenty of consolations for whatever you have to do in this world. I'm only sorry for my sister's sake that I have to draw in my horns a bit. Women like a bit of a splash—at least judging from the comparatively little I know of 'em."

"Miss Cromarty doesn't complain, I hope?"

"Oh, I think she's beginning to see the necessity for reform. You see, when both my civilised elder brothers died ——" he broke off, and then added: "But you know the whole story."

"I would—er—like to refresh my memory," said Simon; and there seemed to be a note of interest and almost of eagerness in his voice that appeared to surprise his visitor afresh.

"First time I ever heard of your memory needing refreshing!" laughed his visitor. "Well, you know how I came back from the wild and woolly west and tried to make a comfortable home for Lilian. We were neither of us likely to marry at our time of life, and there were just the two of us left, and we'd both of us knocked about quite long enough on our own, and so why not settle down together in the old place and be comfortable? At least that's how it struck me. Of course, as you know, we hadn't met for so long that we were practically strangers and she knew the ways of civilisation better than me, and I gave her a pretty free hand in setting up the establishment. I don't blame her, mind you,